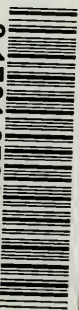


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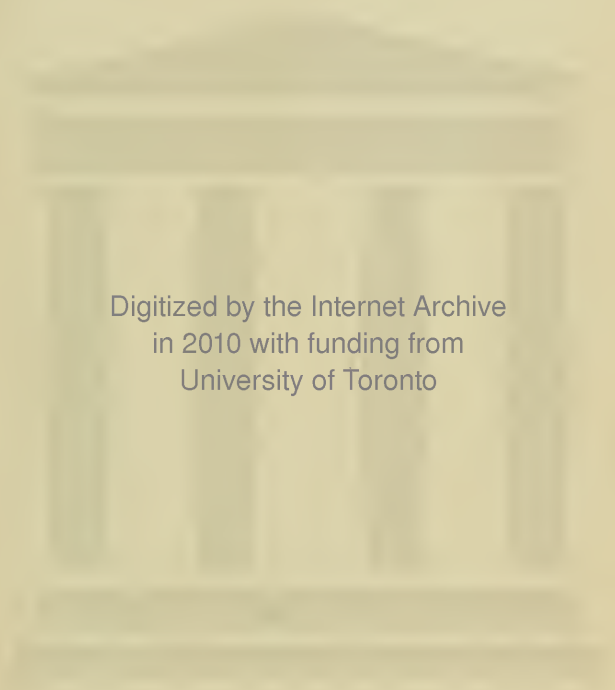


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VILLAGE SERMONS



VILLAGE SERMONS

Preached at Whatley

BY THE LATE

R. W. CHURCH, M.A., D.C.L.

SOMETIME DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S, RECTOR OF WHATLEY
FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE

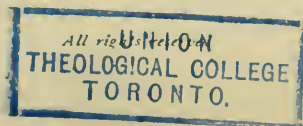
THIRD SERIES

London

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

NEW YORK : THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1901





First Edition, 1897.
Reprinted 1898, 1901.

538
1928

BX
5133
C54 V5
1899
V.3

GLASGOW : PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO.

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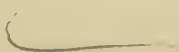
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I

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

“The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”—ST. MATTHEW iv. 17.

WHEN Jesus Christ came preaching at the first, He said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This was the reason He gave why people should attend to Him, and leave their evil ways; that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, was close upon them, was almost come. Most people thought at the time that this meant that the end of the world was coming, the setting up of the perfect reign of righteousness in a new heaven and a new earth. They were mistaken. It did not mean that Christ was coming yet in visible glory. It did not mean that the present state of the world was so near its end. It meant certainly, in some way or other, the coming near of the power, and judgment, and righteousness of God. But it did not mean that outward show of glory, that final triumph of righteousness over sin and evil, that outward setting up in the world of something plainly different from all other earthly things, which many who heard the Lord preach took it to mean.

Advent is now here, and Advent is the time when we specially remember the coming of Christ, and of the kingdom of God: His first coming in the flesh, as our Brother and our Saviour; His second coming in the glory of the Father, as our Judge. This time till Christmas comes seems to take up and repeat the first words of Christ—"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And it makes us think, what is the kingdom of heaven, which Christ, so many hundred years ago, said was at hand? Since it did not mean an outward earthly kingdom, like the kingdoms of this world, what did it mean? Since it did not, as is plain, mean that the world was coming to an end, to make room for the final manifestation of the kingdom of God, what was that kingdom of God which was so immediately to be set up and realized, even on the earth?

When Christ said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," I suppose He meant by the coming of the kingdom of heaven, both something outward and something inward. The something outward, which He meant, was the gathering together and setting up among men of the universal Church of Christ. When He sent forth His apostles and preachers to call all nations to the obedience of faith, to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to unite them all, Jews and Greeks, high and low, wise and simple, into one body, with one faith, one baptism, one Lord—a new kingdom, in which Christ was God and King, came into the world. That was the kingdom which Christ said

was coming ; a kingdom which should grow and increase, and fill the earth ; a kingdom which should last on when earthly kingdoms fell to pieces and disappeared ; a kingdom not of this world, yet changing the course of this world ; a kingdom against which the gates of hell should never prevail ; a kingdom in which Christ should have power over all flesh, as He said, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth" ; a kingdom in which Christ the Saviour should be with His servants, always, even to the end of the world ; a kingdom in which men should find light, and truth, and guidance, and pardon, and peace ; a kingdom in which God's servants should be trained on earth for His service in heaven ; a kingdom in which the Spirit of God and Christ should be ever present, new-creating the hearts of men, filling them with the fruits of righteousness, shaping them anew in the likeness of their Father and Saviour. This is what has actually been in the universal Church of Christ, the great company of all faithful people throughout the world, since Christ's coming. It was in very deed a new kingdom in the world. It was a kingdom which was set up from heaven, which has been kept from harm and destruction by the hand of God against all earthly foes, against the natural tendency of all things to decay, which has in it the laws and the words and the hopes of heaven. It was for this kingdom of heaven, so different from all that people expected, that Jesus Christ told men to prepare.

But by the kingdom of heaven He meant something inward too. The kingdom of heaven comes

not merely outwardly, to the world at large, as the Church of Christ in which He dwells and rules ; but also to each one of us, singly and as individuals, as the immediate and personal claim of Christ to be *our* King, the King of our hearts and lives. So that though the kingdom of heaven is already set up outwardly in the earth, the call still comes to each man for himself: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." To him, the drawing near of the kingdom of heaven means the opening to him of all the riches and reality of grace, which Christ has bought with His life and sacrifice for men, and which, one by one, He offers to each of us.

We see, indeed, the kingdom of heaven come upon earth so far as this, that for ages past He who is the Lord and hope of the world has had His name and greatness confessed and honoured among men ; for ages past kingdoms and nations have acknowledged Him as Lord of lords ; for ages past the great company and Church of Christian men have been in the world proclaiming His praises, adoring His name, testifying far and near to the power and the grace of Christ. But though that is so, and though that gives glory to God, and is the saving of the world, yet to each one of us, to each single man, it is nothing that the kingdom of heaven is come, is on the earth, is all round him, unless the kingdom of heaven is also within him, set up in his own soul. Yet I will not say it is nothing to him, for, anyhow, it must be a great deal ; only it is not to his good, it is not to his salvation, it is not to his peace, it is not to his safety ; it is only to his condemnation and extreme danger that the kingdom of

heaven should be in the world, and yet not have entered into his own soul.

What does St. Paul say in explaining what the kingdom of God is to each individual soul? "The kingdom of God," he says, "is not meat and drink ; but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." And what does St. Paul's Master say when the Pharisees asked Him when the kingdom of God should come? "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you." That is, the kingdom of God is within us, when in our inward souls we are obedient to Christ as our King and Ruler. Christ may rule in the Church, Christ may have obedience paid to Him, and witness borne to His heavenly majesty, in the great multitude of those who are called by His name. But the question for us personally is not merely whether the kingdom of heaven has come in the obedience of others, but whether it has come in the obedience of ourselves.

Let us then hear the call of Christ, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," in this sense. The kingdom of heaven is at hand to us, because we have offered to us now the opportunity of giving our obedience to the gracious Master who is the only one worth serving ; the only King fit to rule over the hearts of men ; a King of righteousness, a King of peace, a King who sheds joy and gladness on every loyal soul. The time is come for us to give up every thought of self-will, every habit of disobedience against the words and example of Jesus Christ. The time has come, over and over again ; but once more, at least to us it has come yet another time. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," means to each of

us, Now is your day of grace, now is your accepted time, now is the opportunity when, if you will, the grace of Christ is open to you, the grace of Christ is waiting to assist your poor attempts, to give earnestness to your repentance, to strengthen and give life to your faith, to set you free from the yoke and bondage of your sins, to open your eyes, and to hold up your steps in the paths of goodness, and holiness, and peace. Often and often has this kingdom of heaven been at hand to you ; often and often has it before drawn near. It has in truth been very near you and round you all your life long. But if ever for a single moment you felt your heart moved, your conscience touched, your soul subdued and drawn to what is good and holy, then, in that moment of all others, it was drawing near to you. And many other times besides. Whenever on some great holy day, at Christmas, or on Good Friday, at Easter, at Whitsuntide, the great acts of love of our Master and Saviour are rehearsed and put before you ; whenever the services of the Church, the psalms, the lessons, the hymns, set forth your Saviour, born, crucified, risen, ascended, for you and your salvation, then surely once more the great offer has been made to you, the great opportunity once more given, the kingdom drawn nearer to you, and shown to you as close at hand.

And now again, in such a solemn time, in this solemn season, which reminds us that one day we shall verily see Christ ourselves, see Him sitting on His throne, and hear with our ears that voice which once said "It is finished," hear His voice declare our own everlasting doom—in this time which is sent to

force on our forgetful souls the remembrance that indeed He shall come again—in this time the call is given, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand”; the opening to the inward kingdom of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; the opening of it to all who heed it, as well as to all who are careless in their service of it, to all who are now without it, to all who are still strangers to the true righteousness of God, and have not yet found the peace and joy, which are only the heritage of the kingdom of heaven.

“The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” How many awful announcements are wrapt up in these few and simple words. “The kingdom of heaven is at hand”; therefore all those things which flourish here on earth contrary to the laws and righteousness of that kingdom are doomed to speedy ruin. All the wickedness, all the daring unscrupulousness, all the worldliness which holds up its head and works with so high a hand, fearing nothing, caring for nothing—how quickly is the time coming, ever nearer and nearer, that must sweep it all away to the place appointed for it. “The kingdom of heaven is at hand”; therefore it will not be long before the hope of the righteous is fulfilled. He who has held fast to his true faith in Christ, who, in suffering and disappointment, has never lost his trust in the goodness of that Lord who perhaps has chastened him so heavily, has only to wait a little while and the trial will be over, the day of patience and faithful suffering will have ended, and the day of refreshment shall have come, to last for ever.

“The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Therefore

we shall soon have cleared up all those doubts and perplexities which try us here, where we see so much evil and so much sorrow allowed, so much wickedness prospering, so much goodness cut short and brought to nothing, so much promise failing, so much hope defeated. The veil will soon be drawn aside, and all will be made plain. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand"; therefore let us endure yet a little while. It is heavy, hard, weary work, to try month after month, year after year, to conquer our sins and temptations, to bear the burdens of our lot in life, to go on doing what we hope is right and yet to find ourselves making so little advance in strength and holiness; to find the peace and joy, spoken of in the Bible, so long in coming, so imperfect in the enjoyment, so easily dispersed and driven away. But "the kingdom of heaven is at hand"; my brethren, fail not nor faint. Cheer yourselves by looking forward to the end of all this. Be persuaded that those who trust the promise of Christ shall at the last find Him true, and still more gracious even than His promises. And it is but for a little while. Time here is, after all, but short; the end is not far off. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand"; the kingdom of heaven in its manifested and final victory over time and death, the kingdom of heaven in its completeness and perfection in the souls which Christ has redeemed, which have loved the Lord, and have had faith to wait for His appearing.

II

THE TRIAL OF MEN'S WORK

“Every man’s work shall be made manifest : for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire ; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.”—I COR. iii. 13.

I HAVE no intention of entering particularly into the exact meaning of this passage of St. Paul’s writings. It has appeared to mean several different things to different people ; and this shows that it is not perfectly clear what it was that St. Paul had in his mind. But anything that takes our thoughts on to the end of all things, and the way in which God is to pass judgment on what has been done here on earth, must be full of what no words could enable us perfectly to understand. We can understand what it is that God should pass judgment on men and their doings. But we cannot understand *how*, in what manner, He will do this ; because all that is to take place then is quite beyond our knowledge and experience. All things then will be changed, and also the ways of doing things. So I shall not stop to ask what, in particular, these words refer to ; but only dwell for a few minutes on the general thing which there can be no doubt is put before our thoughts in them.

“Every man’s work,” says St. Paul, “shall be made manifest ; for the day”—that is, the day of God’s visitation and judgment, the day of God—“shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire ; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” We might like to know what St. Paul specially means by this trying fire. But it is no use asking. It is not told us. Yet it is perfectly clear *generally* what is meant. It is perfectly clear that he speaks of a trial—sharp, severe, unsparing, terrible—as when fire tries the strength and endurance of that which is put into it ; tries what will stand its fierce heat, and what will perish under it. More, I say, we know not than that St. Paul uses the fire which burns up the wood, hay, stubble, and leaves unharmed the gold and silver and precious stones, to signify the searching reality, from which there is no escape, of the judgment which men must one day expect to go through before God.

This then is the great thought to fix our minds upon. “Every man’s work shall be made manifest.” We go on living from day to day, and it is not manifest and clear what each of us is doing. Some, no doubt, make it but too manifest even now what they are doing against God’s will and law. Some, on the other hand, show signs which we can hardly mistake, of all that is pure, and holy, and true, of all that betokens the very presence of the renewing Spirit, and that the grace of God has not been working in them in vain. But of how many others it is impossible to say or to guess, of what sort their daily life and work really are ! Very likely they have not the faintest notion themselves. Still more

likely no one else has the least power of knowing what they really are in the eyes of God, and which way, on the whole, they are going. And so we go on living, as if it never was to be brought to an issue and decision, of what sort our lives are, of what account our doings are in the sight of God. Now He gives us no sign. He has told us what is right and true. He has sent us His Son to redeem us, His Spirit to enlighten and make us new. But all this is in secret, partly the secret of time long past, of ages long ago; partly the secret of the unseen depths of the eternal throne, and of man's heart and soul. So now we go on, each in his own way, each following his own path, each living his own life, each doing his own work, each taking the right path or the wrong one. And on the whole, nothing decisive, nothing final and for good, appears to show who has taken the right path, and who the wrong one; who is doing the things which will endure trial, which will stand being looked into, and examined, and weighed, and judged of; which will bear the light, bear the fierce beating on them of the perfect light, bear to have the truth spoken of them by Him who cannot be deceived, cannot be mistaken. Now, I say, we have no notion of such certain judgment. Particular actions may be searched into very closely; but not the whole course of any man's life. We live, we work, we think, we speak, we pass through life, we pass out of it; and it cannot be said that there is anything certainly and clearly settled about the real way in which most of us did our part here.

But this is to be settled one day. There is to come a time when what is so uncertain now, and so

full of doubt, will be made clear. To whom, and in what way, we cannot tell. Whether to other people, whether to those who knew us and lived with us here, it will hereafter be shown, in the light of God's judgment, what we were in our lives on earth, we absolutely cannot tell; and it is of no use asking or guessing. But to one person we shall certainly be made known. One person will certainly have to learn exactly of what sort were our doings and our lives here in the body. Before the eyes of one soul at least the veil will be withdrawn. That one soul will see, without any mistake, what our life here was really worth. One soul at least will know exactly what God thinks of us, what He has been thinking of us all along. In one soul it will be revealed how we and our works stand that searching, impartial examination and trial, which all are to go through, and which will try each man's work of what sort it is.

And do you ask who is that person to whom we shall be fully made known? We shall know ourselves. We whom that knowledge most concerns, we shall know for certain what we have been, what we were all along, what God thinks of us. We shall then, at last, see our very real selves in the true light. Now we can keep that knowledge at arm's length. Even conscience may mistake and deceive us here. But then there will be no room for doubt. Somehow or other we shall be made to see ourselves, with a clearness and a certainty of which nothing can give us any notion here; for then we shall know and see ourselves in the light of that judgment which will be passed upon all things by God Himself. If no one knows it but ourselves, we at least shall know

whether we have *used* our life here or *abused* it; whether we have turned it to good account or thrown it away; whether or not it will stand looking into by a most righteous and most loving eye. We shall know the full and final truth about ourselves, if no one else in the world does.

This then is the thing that St. Paul puts before our thoughts and bids us remember. This uncertain state in which we are here about ourselves and about others is to have an end. What is unknown and doubtful now is at last to be all cleared up. We who now can hedge ourselves in, and refuse to let even our own selves know what we are—we must one day be put through a trial which shall set everything in its true light, and settle for ever all doubts about us. There is to be a day of decision about us. And the trial on which that decision will rest will be one searching every corner of our life and character. For the trial is likened to fire. The day of which he speaks, “shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon”—that is, on the only foundation any man can lay, Christ Jesus—“he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

You see, he is not even speaking of those who cannot stand the fiery trial at all. He is not speaking of the impenitent, the rebellious, the unbelieving, the unfaithful, the lost. He is not speaking of those who lose soul and hope and all, in that fierce judgment. He is speaking of those who shall be saved, though hardly, and “as by fire,” and with “loss.” If

some even of those who are saved, are yet saved, "as by fire" and "suffering loss," what shall the end be of those who have not even the foundation? What shall be the end of those in whom the trial shall make manifest and declare that their lives will not bear looking into at all; that they have been all wrong, all hollow and self-deceiving, all selfish and ungodly?

How shall we prepare for the trial? There is no short and easy way to do it. It is a trial by fire; it is a trial which will make short work of all appearances; and for which outside work and make-believe preparation will be of no use. There is but one way. To live now as if we were even now before Him who tries the hearts and reins. To live now in truth and honesty towards God. To live now doing each day's work, and each day's duty, with a faithful and earnest and godly spirit; doing it to the Lord and not to men. The division and judgment will be on the whole sum, and completed account, and result of all our days. Let each day take good care of itself, and of the things of itself. And then, and then only, may we hope that the trial and judgment upon the whole of them will take care of itself.

There is no short way of preparing ourselves safely and surely for that awful examination, which will cut sharply through all those refuges of lies in which men may trust here. But it will be wise in us to take every opportunity of rehearsing before our own thoughts and feelings, the exactness, the searching keenness of what we must meet at last. God's providence makes out our time for us. Months and years roll on, and show a certain portion of our lives

completed. One period is closed with all its occurrences, and another opens. Sorrow comes, and advancing days, and changes. Change of thought, change of place, change of work—all these are hints, calls, invitations, which will be understood and not neglected by those who are wise of heart to review and pass judgment on the course and progress of their life. And in new circumstances we may perchance get a new view of ourselves. When a break of any kind comes in the regular course of our days, it is a help—often coming with so much to soften, to subdue us, to bring home our opportunities ill used, our omissions, neglects, mistakes; a help to us, I say, to get out of the regular accustomed groove in which we go on, and to reconsider with more unprejudiced and freer thought, of what sort in reality our life and our ways are.

The great thing is to have the remembrance of that great decision which awaits us ever present to our thoughts. It is meant, not to alarm and disturb us, but to make us in earnest. And the only way to hinder it from alarming us is to let it sober us into earnestness and truth. It is no use, it is no comfort, foolishly to shut our eyes, and to cheat ourselves into a fancy that it will not come, because we do not think about it. But it is a comfort to look forward even to that awful trial and scrutiny of hearts, and motives, and behaviour, if we have the testimony of our conscience that we have tried honestly to give up our souls to God; that we have bowed down our pride and our rebellious wishes to that which He has appointed and made known to us: that, bowing before His infinite, unutterable

Majesty, we have faithfully followed His leading and His calls.

And are we walking as He would have us walk? Are we honest and in earnest in making that use of our days and our works which we believe it is His will that we should? Then the trial is to prove and make this clear; and also to make it sure. Then we can bear to think of even that trial. We can bear to face that certainty which our thoughts force home on us, which Jesus Christ our Sacrifice, our Mediator with the Father, has placed beyond a doubt; which each turn and shifting in the manifold changes and chances of our mortal life, each year, each month, each week, each day, as it closes, commends solemnly to our remembrance, and with more or less of clearness reveals to our souls, as they look forward to what is to come—"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." For that great day of reckoning and of trial may God prepare us. In that great day of judgment and decision may God have mercy upon us and deliver us—us, so weak, so ignorant, so sinful, and yet charged with the burden of the blessing of an eternal heritage.

III

PREPARING FOR THE LORD

“John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose.”—ST. JOHN i. 26, 27.

WHEN Christ came to visit us the first time, great preparations were made for His coming. We were reminded of this in the Gospel for last Sunday,¹ and we are again reminded of it in the Gospel for to-day. He sent His messenger before Him. Just as when a king comes to visit some city of his kingdom he sends persons before to give notice of his approach, and to tell people to be ready for him, so did the great King and Saviour of mankind send His forerunner before His face. His forerunner was the great preacher John the Baptist, of whom we read last Sunday, and of whom to-day’s Gospel also speaks. Last Sunday’s Gospel gave us our Lord’s testimony to John the Baptist; to-day’s Gospel gives us John’s testimony about Christ, and about his own office in preparing the way for Christ.

John the Baptist was raised up for this one purpose, to prepare the Jews for the coming of Christ.

¹ Advent Sunday.

For this end he was miraculously born, out of the course of nature. For this end an angel was sent to foretell his birth, and what he was to be. "He shall be great," said the angel to Zacharias, "great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Such was the description of John the Baptist and his work, given by the angel Gabriel, before he was conceived in the womb. And he lived only to fulfil this description. For this end he was brought up different from other men. He denied himself the society of men and the ordinary pleasures of life. He was in the deserts till the time of his showing to Israel. He lived on locusts and wild honey. He had nothing but the coarsest and poorest clothing—raiment of camel's hair and a leathern girdle. He lived all by himself, alone with God, separate from the world. All this was to train him to be a hardy and bold witness for God against the sins of men; to teach him not to care for the things which tempt men, for the enjoyments, even the lawful and innocent ones, which make us too often forgetful of God's judgment on sin, and slack and careless about our duty. And when he was himself prepared, he came forth to prepare others. He came preaching in the wilderness, telling the people that the kingdom of heaven

was at hand, bidding them prepare for the great King who was at hand, by repentance, and by putting away the sins that they repented of. We cannot read the account of this preaching in the Gospels without feeling how awful and soul-stirring it must have been. His voice was very stern. His words were short, and terribly clear ones. He pierced through the hypocrites, when they came with the rest to hear him and to receive his baptism as the outward profession of their repentance. "O generation of vipers," he said to them, "who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" What have you to do, you whose religion is one of names and words and talk, what have you to do with the repenting in good earnest, that I am preaching? Who has put it into your heads that you are really in danger? What has touched your hearts to be really in earnest in saving your souls? Then, if you are afraid of the wrath to come, don't keep any longer talking of repentance and religion, but bring forth fruits meet for repentance; live a life suitable to one who repents, bring forth the fruits which can alone show that your repentance is real. "Begin not," he says again, to those who rested in their outward privileges, and their knowledge and profession of a true religion, "begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham"; He is able to make good His promises to Abraham, and yet to do without your formal worship and formal boastings of being His people. Don't waste time, he cries to all; the trial time is at hand, the Judge is all but come, the judgment

is strict and terrible, the condemnation is eternal ruin. "Now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees : every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." He is close at hand, the Prover of every soul and action, the Baptizer with the Holy Ghost, the Purger and Purifier of every one who is to be admitted to His kingdom, whose winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the garner, but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable. Plain and short and sharp were his answers to those who asked him, "What shall we do?" "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none ; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." His words were practical and clear and simple, but they cut at the roots of the sins which each set of men loved best. "What shall we do?" said the publicans, who loved money, and were greedy of unlawful gains, and cheated the people from whom they took taxes. "Exact no more than that which is appointed you," was the answer, which must have made many a publican wince, and feel that if he followed it his gains and trade were gone. "What shall we do?" asked the rough cruel soldiers of that day, whose reason for being soldiers was that they might plunder and rob and murder without punishment. "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely ; and be content with your wages."

Such was John the Baptist's preaching, sharp and clear, and such as none could mistake about ; no soft words, no crying of peace where there was no peace ; but plain words about sin, plain words

about judgment, plain words about repentance, plain words about the duties of each man. He was a preacher thinking nothing about himself, caring nothing for himself, separate, as much as if he were already dead, from the world and its temptations. He was one before whose terrible earnestness all hearers trembled, one whose voice pierced through and through—through all pretences, all excuses—to the depths of their consciences; one whom they could not help listening to even while they felt that his words condemned them; one who reproved even a king for his adultery, and whom even the king whom he reproved and made so angry with him could not help honouring. He was indeed the voice of the Lord issuing from the wilderness, to bear witness against the pride and sin of men, who live in the pleasant fields and the rich cities only to forget their Maker and the Giver of their wealth; who rejoice in God's gifts and yet abuse them. So was the coming of the Lord heralded; by such an example of self-denial, by such burning zeal, by such a loud call to repentance, by such clear showing of what was right and good. "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain." So it had been said, and so it was done.

Naturally, such an appearance made a great noise in Judæa. Such a prophet, such a preacher had not come among men for hundreds of years, and all were struck with astonishment; even those who were not turned from their sins by him. So in the Gospel for

to-day we read how the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? Such a preacher might claim, they thought, to be any one of those great persons foretold in the old prophets. One so bold, so unsparing, so mighty, must, they thought, make out himself to be some great one. Did he call himself the Christ, the Anointed One, for whom all nations were looking out? Or if not He, was he Elijah come back again as Malachi had foretold; or else, that prophet, of whom Moses had said, "God will raise up unto thee a Prophet . . . like unto me"; like unto Moses, and so greater than any other prophet? What was his office, what did he call himself? No, he was none of these. Observe how this great preacher lowers himself, and refuses all the high names that the Jews put before him, and some of which he might have taken. He might have called himself the second Elias; for indeed he was the Elijah whom Malachi had pointed to, for he was come in the spirit and power of Elias. But if he had said so the Jews would have misunderstood him; and he would not claim the prophecy which had been spoken of him. His work, which had made the whole land ring, was but a humble preparation. He was no great prophet, as they thought of a prophet; but a mere Voice crying in the wilderness to others, to prepare the way of the Lord. His baptism was no Christian sacrament, but a mere sign and promise of that forgiveness and washing away of sin, which he could only announce but could not give. The true Baptizer was come, the Giver of the Spirit; the great One of whom all the prophets had spoken was not far off. John himself was nothing; but He for

whom he was preparing the way was everything that Israel had ever looked for. "There standeth One among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

Such is John the Baptist's account of himself; such is his contrast between himself and his Lord, between the work he had been sent to do and that which Christ was to do. Remember that this is he of whom Christ Himself said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." And yet, you see, how John speaks of his work as a mere preparatory work, soon over, soon done with, soon to be put away and forgotten, when He for whom he is preparing shall really come. It was of importance and value only if it *was* preparation.

What the Baptist felt of his preparatory work, every Christian must feel when his thoughts go forward to the real coming and appearance of Jesus Christ and His kingdom. What is all that we do or busy ourselves about here, in the way of religion, but a mere preparing for that eternal kingdom which, when it comes, shall make even the faith and hope and love of this life seem but of small account? *That* kingdom is heaven, *that* is the reality; all that is here now is but the faint tidings and foreshadowing of it. That is the substance, we have the shadows; that is the true building, this but the rough scaffolding, soon to be taken down and disappear, and not worth mentioning in comparison of that glory and truth for which it is the preparation.

Christmas comes and reminds us of the Advent of

our great King; how He came once and how He will come again. We keep it, and speak of it, as if everything was actually taking place, and we frame our minds to it as to the very thing itself. But Advent, and Christmas, and Easter—high and glorious festivals as they are—are but weak and passing shadows. There is nothing real in them except the faith and love which they may kindle in us. Christ is not come though it is Advent season. Christ is not born at Bethlehem now though we sing our Christmas hymns. Christ is no more crucified on Good Friday, or raised at Easter, though we mourn on the one day and rejoice on the other. All is but preparation, all is but scaffolding put up for the time present. But what is it all, with its mourning and piercing of heart, and awful looking for of judgment on the one hand, with its rejoicing and lifting up of glad hands and spirits on the other—what is it all, compared with what is to come, with what is to be really done and seen one day; with what Christ is in His own very Person and visible Presence; with what that real Advent and coming shall be, when He, who is even now secretly in the midst of us, shall be revealed in very truth, our Judge, our King, our only Hope; when in earnest the axe shall be laid to the root of the tree—in earnest the winnowing fan shall begin to separate the wheat from the chaff in the threshing floor of God; when in earnest the garner of heaven shall be opened; when in earnest the fire unquenchable shall be beheld?

These things are the realities of our faith and religion. Till these things come nothing is finished, nothing perfected, nothing is yet as it is to be for

ever. Till these things come, all the patience and labours of saints are but beginnings, all their great works but a preparation, a levelling of the road, a breaking up of what stands in the way. Till these things come all duty is but a striving, all holiness is unripened, all peace and rest are uncertain and liable to be shaken. Who of us, who among Christians now, has done for good what John the Baptist did? Yet to him, his great office, his voice from the wilderness which stirred up the people, his mighty preaching of repentance, was but a passing momentary matter, a mere step towards the kingdom of God, of the lightest possible account compared with that for which it was the preparation. It is true that since then Christ came; but He is also gone away again. And till He returns the second time, all is but looking forward and not yet attaining: all is yet in hope and not in possession. So let Advent, while it reminds us that Christ is coming, remind us also that He is not yet come, and that nothing on earth can give us an idea of the reality of what that coming will be, when it arrives. Nothing on earth can be anything more than preparation for it, to be left behind and forgotten when the kingdom of God shall indeed be revealed. Our religion, our faith, our repentance, our diligent endeavour to glorify God and to do His will, are nothing in themselves, unless they look forward to that which is the substance and the truth; unless they are the preparation, and scaffolding, and ladder, by which we are to pass on and reach it. All is preparation here and nothing accomplishment; and if we are wise, we shall think of all that we do or suffer here

as John the Baptist did ;—of our trials, of our victories over sin, of what we do for God's sake—as not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed, as not worthy a word or a thought besides that of doing our very best, and enduring all things patiently ; and then, forgetting what we have done and what we have had to bear, we shall think even as John the Baptist did, who felt after all his labours, that he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose the latchet of the shoe of Him for whom he had come preparing the way. We are walking among shadows but with realities promised us, and not very far off. We are working in what must perish, in what is of little value and must be left behind us ; but our work is for a crown which is incorruptible and eternal, waiting in the heavens for those who win it. Let us look off from things here to that for which things here are only preparing the way. Let us fix in our minds such a deep and abiding sense of that which is to come as may make us put the true value on that which we have to do here.

IV

THE LITTLE CHILD

“Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”—ST. MATTHEW xviii. 3, 4.

THE whole of the Gospel history shows us Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, made Man. To-day reminds us of something more—that He was made a child. The great God who made us, He who is over all in the kingdom of heaven, and has been so from all eternity, became a little child ; He humbled Himself not only to take our nature on Him, not only to suffer and die, but He humbled Himself as this little child, whom, as we read, He took up in His arms. So truly, so perfectly, were Christ’s words only the natural following out, the likeness and copy as it were, of His deeds. He had already done this very thing Himself to which He calls us. He had already made the step in very earnest. He had already accepted literally that humiliation, which in heart and spirit all must take and go through, who would follow Him to heaven and glory. When we read His words, for the first time, about becoming as little children, we think of them only, perhaps,

as a strong and striking way of speaking ; when we think a little more carefully about them the second time—at least when we think of them at Christmas—we see that they are the very lesson of His life ; that He is setting before us in them what He Himself had really done—His own gracious humility—as the example He meant us to think of and to follow.

The beginning of that mighty salvation, that great victory of God made Man, which was to last for all ages, was small and lowly indeed. The beginning of that great and glorious work was that “Unto us a child is born.” The prophet goes on, with all that is most marvellous and most divine : “the government,” he says, “shall be upon His shoulder : and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” All this was the Redeemer of the world to be. But the beginning of it all is the lowly announcement, “Unto us a child is born.” Most strange and marvellous ! Indeed God’s ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts. If we would know what the great Saviour of the world was like when He came down to conquer sin and death, when He first took upon Him to deliver man, look on the last little helpless infant born into the world. Such was once Jesus Christ. Look on your little children, when they cannot speak their wants and tell you their pains, when they lie in your arms, and would perish if you left them for a day to themselves. Such was once Jesus Christ. Look at them, when day by day, and week by week, and month by month, they slowly and with crying

and tears, struggle through their first years, from utter weakness to a little more strength, which is at best but small and frail and easily overthrown. Such was once Jesus Christ. Look at your children depending on you entirely for their morsel of daily bread, not able to help you in getting it, not able to share in your troubles, or to speak and comfort you in your distress. Such was once the Lord Jesus Christ. See how long your children take in growing up, how long they take before they can understand the plainest, commonest things which are necessary. Such was once the Lord Jesus Christ. The affairs of the world, the affairs of our own households go on, but they have nothing to do with them, with what is of importance and interest to grown people. They are kept to childish plays and childish tasks ; we do not let them into our secrets, we do not take counsel with them or ask their advice ; we expect them to be silent and humble, and to keep in the background, and to obey us without asking questions. Such was once the Lord Jesus Christ. We expect no great things of them. We are content if they are good, and sweet tempered, and modest, and truth-telling ; if they are not forward and disobedient ; if they do what little they can do, as we teach them to do it. And if they so far go right, we look on them with a mixture of pity and love, because they are so helpless, and yet are in some ways more free from sin than ourselves. Of so little account and importance in the world was once the Lord Jesus Christ : a meek, obedient child, slowly growing up, and giving promise of good to come ; but nothing thought of, and taking no part in even the humble

concerns of the humble carpenter's household. Such was the beginning that He chose for Himself, such was all that appeared at first sight, of that which was to end in the redemption of thousands and ten thousands of human souls, and in the songs of saints and angels in heaven, for ever singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

Such is the great marvel and mystery that Christmas, year by year, brings back into our thoughts. Each one of our little children is, as it were, an image of what Jesus Christ was once. They are His image, and reminders of Him, in all their different ages, as long as they are children. For all that they are, all that they have passed through, the new-born infant, and the child just learning to know what is right, and to please us by its gentleness and pureness—all that was Jesus Christ in due season.

And now has He not a right to say to us—to us for whom He was first born into the world, and then suffered in it—"Except ye be converted," except ye be changed from your high proud ways, except ye become as little children, ye cannot follow Me, ye cannot be as I am—"ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"? Is it not especially His message to us at this holy season of joy and gladness, when all the land is rejoicing at the remembrance of the blessed tidings which the angels brought from heaven, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." On Good Friday, Christ, as it were, preaches to us from His cross, to crucify sin, to think upon the terrors and horrors of

sin which brought Him to death, and of the death which sin will bring us to, unless we seek for refuge in His wounds and in His salvation. At Whitsuntide He preaches to us, as it were, from His throne in heaven, at the right hand of God the Father, to raise our thoughts and hearts to that glorious home to which He has already gone before, to prepare a place for us. At Advent He preaches to us from His judgment seat, bidding us prepare against His coming to give an account of all our deeds done in the body, and of how we have listened to His heavenly calls and whisperings in our souls. But at Christmas He preaches to us from His lowly cradle in the stable—"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." I was a little child, He says—I who was the Son of God from everlasting—I who made the worlds—I, the Holiest and the Highest—I was made for you a little child; you, for my sake—you, if you hope to be with Me, must become in heart and spirit a little child too.

O most reasonable, and just, and necessary lesson! yet most difficult one. To become as a little child means to have conquered our pride; and what is there in all man's life more difficult, what is it that fewest succeed in, what is it that sticks to us to the last, even when all else is forced from us, but our pride? All have pride. It is in the poor as strongly as in the rich, in the young as strongly as in the old, in the sick, even, as well as in the strong and healthy. Men will suffer adversity patiently, but it is another thing to give up their pride. Men will resist the temptations of the world, but they cannot give up

their pride. Men will be kind, and just, and industrious, and honest, but if their pride is wounded they will be hard and obstinate. Men who have appeared to have conquered and got rid of all other gross sins yet are overcome still by their pride. Trouble and losses may bow us down to the very ground, but they do not crush our pride. To overcome it is the lesson of lessons. We see how hard it was, by the pains which Jesus Christ took to overcome it in us; why else need He have humbled Himself so deeply—to death, to the form of a servant, to being made a little child—but that He saw, that even the humiliation of the Eternal Son of God would be all too little to wean the world from its pride, and that nothing less could overcome pride, even in the hearts of His own elect, of those who were to be most obedient to His grace?

Yet how can we resist that example? If He had merely said, you must become as little children to enter into the kingdom of heaven—if He had merely *said* these words as His command, as a great prophet and preacher might have said them, as Moses or one of the prophets, speaking with great authority and power, they might have had less in them to persuade us. Pride rises up against being taught, as well as against being rebuked or chastised. But He has not merely *said* them. He has *done* them first Himself. It is the little child of Bethlehem, He who, before He was that little child, was worshipped by the angels on the throne of all the worlds—it is the little, helpless, speechless child of Bethlehem who has come to us with the message. It is He who lovingly beseeches us to lay aside our pride, our

high-mindedness, our hard and stubborn and scornful heart, and to let Him guide us to peace and to glory. It is He who was laid in His rude crib, that we might be persuaded that there was nothing to be ashamed of in being meek and lowly of heart, for the Eternal God had not thought it beneath Him to descend to the feebleness of a child. It is the little child of Bethlehem who pleads with us against our pride; who shows us the way, in His own humbleness, to be humble; who tries to persuade us, by the example that we see in Him, that He is but speaking the necessary truth, in telling us that we must become as little children. Can we disbelieve Him, when we see Him forced, in order to save us, to go through the long, weary, despised years of infancy? Can we shut our hearts against His appeal, when in order to win and touch our hearts, He pleads with us, as one of our little helpless children? If we can resist the wisdom, and the majesty, and the threatenings of a teacher speaking the words of truth and soberness, can we resist the example and entreaties of the child Jesus.

Many proud hearts, who would not listen to a man, will bow down and listen to a child. And how deeply are we touched and moved when a helpless and innocent child speaks words, as it were, above its years; when it gives us an example of patience and quietness on the bed of suffering; when, without knowing what it says, it bears testimony against our grown-up faults and follies; when, perhaps made wiser and older by approaching death, it tells us, in simple childlike words, some great truth of the kingdom of heaven. How do we catch such

words ! How do we feel that our hearts melt under them ; that all our pride, as grown-up men and women, gives way under them ; and we are content to sit as learners at the feet of our own child ! And shall we, who listen to them, turn a deaf ear when the holy and blessed child who speaks to us, is He who for our sakes, and to encourage us to believe His words, came down from heaven, and became a child ? Shall we, who are so soft-hearted, who can hardly keep in our tears, when we remember the sayings, or the last requests, or the looks of some child whom God has given us and then taken from us—shall we still hold out, with unmoved, cold, careless hearts, when Christmas reminds us once more of our Saviour's lowly birth and infancy—of how the hands that made the world, and the arms that bear it up, were stretched out in imploring helplessness—of how the lips that said, " Let there be light," and the mouth from which is to come forth the judgment and doom of all mankind, were closed in silence and speechlessness—in order that we might be persuaded that indeed He spake truly, and said no more than He was willing to prove by His own experience, when He said the words, " Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven " ?

As I said before, I know it is a difficult lesson. But that is all the more reason why we should turn to account every opportunity by which God, in His love and goodness, makes it easier to us to learn. And surely the thought of such a miracle of love, as the birth of Jesus Christ at Bethlehem, is one of those aids which our Heavenly Father gives us to

take off the difficulty, to help us to give way, and come down from our pride with less repugnance, and with a better heart. Surely nothing would so win and allure us to the humble-mindedness and meek gentleness which was in Jesus Christ, as thinking, in the midst of our gladness, of what He did not disdain or refuse for our sakes. How shall we think scorn of humbling our proud and self-satisfied hearts, when we read of the doings in the stable of the inn at Bethlehem? How shall we think those words about becoming as little children, vain words, words of course, words which mean nothing to us, when we hear them in church—when the very name and meaning of to-day shows us—that there was nothing which Christ thought too humble for Himself, so that He might show His love and sympathy for us? I am sure that there are few, if any, who hear me but would feel it a great step made, if they would fairly and truly put before their minds, Christ, the little child, lying helpless as one of their own children, wanting all the care that their own children want, to give them the greatest lesson of humility that heaven and earth could give. I am sure that we should all of us feel our pride tamed and abated, if we would but think of this, as God meant us to think of it. I am sure that if we so used Christmas rightly, we should, by God's grace, feel it easier in the year which is coming to gain a victory over our pride and self-will, and our obstinate temper, than we have found it in the past year; and that every Christmas would help us onwards, as long as we set our hearts to consider what is brought before us in its great lesson. When we feel conceited and self-satisfied

about our own doings, Christ, born in nakedness and poverty, would make us ashamed to show such feelings. When we feel unforgiving and stubborn, and resolved not to submit to or to be reconciled with our brethren, Christ, forcing Himself to bear the distress and the contempt of a child's life, would rise up in our hearts to reproach us. When we feel wise in our own eyes, and think that we know enough, and want no more teaching—when the gospel is beginning to seem foolishness to our worldly wisdom, Christ the wisdom of God, and the power of God, yet made a little child, will come into our minds ; and how small and poor and worthless will that thought make our pride, and our sharpness, and our knowledge seem.

Think much of Christ the little child, and you will be ashamed to be jealous and envious of one another. Think of Christ the little child, and you will not find it so hard to give way when you are contradicted, to keep your temper when you are provoked, to humble yourself in God's sight when you are vexed by the unkindness of men.

Think thus, in your rejoicing, my brethren ; think of Christ humbled to the weakness of infancy, as well as to the weakness of pain and death. Think of Him much—He would give you comfort in His humiliation, and has given you in His own sacred person the proof of that saying of His, so necessary for us to remember—" Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”—ST. LUKE ii. 13, 14.

THIS is the message from heaven that meets us too, as the course of the month brings us, in our pilgrimage through life, to this holy season. The message to the shepherds was the message sent to all the earth. It has come to all generations before us, to each in their turn. It has gladdened the hearts of our fathers, and our fathers' fathers before us, in this our land. It has been sung over all the earth, in languages very different from our own. And Christmas after Christmas, as the remembrance of the great reconciliation was refreshed and recalled, the joy of the shepherds was renewed by these words from heaven. Each Christmas that we have spent here we have heard them. And, if we knew at all what our souls were worth, they have brought us comfort. But long before we were born, Christmas was kept in this parish, and in this church, and the song of the angels was repeated, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” It was repeated when first

Christians lived on this spot, and gathered together in the place where our church now stands, to worship their Redeemer. And never since then has the glad sound failed at Christmas, or the heavenly message been withdrawn. Year unto year has echoed it, generation has called to generation with the angelic song of praise ; our fathers handed it on to us, and our children are now learning it from us, to teach it to their children yet unborn. From mouth to mouth it has been repeated, from the inhabitants of heaven who first sung it, to us sinners who take up in our poor measure this glorious burst of joy.

It teaches us what are the two prevailing feelings in a Christian soul, when Christmas calls once more to our remembrance Christ the Son of God made man for us. What feelings ought to rule in our hearts at a time like this? What feelings ought to take the chief place above all others, when the reason why we are rejoicing and keeping festival is the remembrance of the beginning of our great salvation? What can they be, but chief and first of all, the hearty desire to give glory to God in the highest ; and next, the desire equally hearty, that all men may taste and enjoy that heavenly peace which God came down on earth to bring us. "Glory to God in the highest," sang the angels, "and on earth peace, good will toward men." How shall we keep Christmas fittingly, except by the deepest and most earnest heart-worship, and giving of glory to our glorious King ; and by striving after His peace and His good will in ourselves and among all our brethren ?

The song of the angels calls on you to join with

the heavenly host in giving "Glory to God in the highest." Try and think of all that this time recalls, and let it warm and quicken your heart to the sincerity of prayer and heartiness of praise which such mercies call for. We are keeping in mind the most wonderful act of God's love that the world has ever known: the coming of His only begotten Son in our flesh, and as man. We are keeping in mind the ending of the old Covenant and the beginning of the new; the passing away of the shadows, and the opening of the light of heaven. We are keeping in mind that period in the counsels of God, when at last the fulness of time was come, when promises and preparations were over, when the doubt and uncertainty in which men had lived, and passed through life to death, were come to an end; and it was at last to be revealed to the sons of men how deeply God loved them, what honour He was ready to put on them, how low He could stoop to win their hearts and love for Himself. We are keeping in mind the first clear announcement to men of the great reconciliation between them and their God; how, after ages of sin and rebellion, of disappointment and punishment, He was come indeed to be their God, by becoming their son and their brother—in His own person to make peace between their sinful nature and His own. How all the dealings of God seem changed from that hour which we are now keeping in memory. Look at God's dealings, look at God's language in the Old Testament under the Law, and look at them in the New Testament under the Gospel. Look at the awful distance at which He seems to be from men under the Law, at

the dark and doubtful words which He speaks to disobedient and stiff-necked men ; and then compare the words that Christ speaks to us, the nearness and likeness to our own human selves which we behold in Him ; how we feel that He is our very brother, very near and kin to us ; how He speaks the simple, plain words of love and human sympathy to us. And then judge of the difference which His coming in the flesh has made, not only in the eternal hopes, but in the present consolation and thoughts of man. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." What should we do if we had not these words? What would life and the world be to us if these wonderful disclosures of God's love were taken away from us? And what we are celebrating to-day is the opening to the world for the first time of that mystery of grace, the rising on mankind of that Sun which never sets, the only Light of those who sit in the darkness of this mortal life, and have to go through the valley of the shadow of death at the end of it. Oh, let us try and tune our hearts to some accord with the great thought of Christmas ; let us tune them to sing with unfeigned thankfulness and warmth the song of adoration to Him who was born at Bethlehem ; let us tune them to sing not quite out of harmony with those blessed spirits, whose love and worship broke forth into that everlasting strain over the manger where He was laid, "Glory to God in the highest."

Nor should we stop, any more than they did, at worship and thanksgiving paid on high. They thought of men as well as God. Raised above all the sorrows and temptations of mortal life, still they thought of men, whom their God had loved so well. Exalted above man's nature, strangers to his sins, yet they sympathized with the joy which they were bringing him, and rejoiced at the glorious recovery from his fall and condemnation which God was preparing for him. The angels who are so far above us thought not only of the glory of God, but also of peace among men. And we have brethren, kindred, neighbours. We need their help, and they need ours. They are flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone. Our troubles and wants they have ; their infirmities, their temptations, their sins, their sorrows, we have too. Shall we not think of the things that belong to their peace, now that we are giving thanks and glory to God for all that He has done for the world, for us and for them together? Shall not our hearts be turned one to another with greater tenderness, with greater yearning after peace, and good will, and brotherly love, now that we are thinking of all the great things which God has done for us all in common ; of the common ruin into which our common sin had plunged us ; of the common escape and salvation which Christ's grace has purchased for us all ; of the unspeakable love with which He loved us all, one as much as another? Surely, if we feel in any degree the blessings of which Christmas is the memorial, we shall also wish and strive for that which we know God wishes for. If we feel in any degree His love towards us in giving us His Son,

we shall in our measure strive that that love may grow and abound among the souls which He so loved ; we shall strive that that peace may be found among them which He came down to give. We shall think of our brethren more warmly, with more interest, with more anxiety for their good and for their happiness. We shall think more how we may do them good, and help them on in all good things, in peaceful days, in their Christian life. We shall think of their needs, we shall remember their sorrows, we shall feel gently towards their infirmities ; we shall pray and strive that no word or deed of ours may lightly or needlessly wound their souls or break their peace. We shall earnestly wish and pray that the calm and peace of Christmas may rest on all our households, on all our friends, on all our meetings, over our days and nights ; and that nothing unholy, nothing unloving, may break in to spoil or disturb it.

And how thankful ought we to be that we are able to enjoy its calm, able to think, without being troubled by sorrow or suffering, of all the blessed things of which it is the memorial. How thankful that to us it comes without being darkened ; without seeming to mock our heart's bitterness with its outward signs of rejoicing. Surely it is a call, every time it thus comes, to think of God's goodness to us. It reminds us that God is dealing gently and tenderly with us. It ought to be a mark and token, in each year that it thus comes, that we have much thanks to render to God for the prosperity that is still unshaken, for the blessings that He is still leaving to us. For, be sure, it is not to every one that

Christmas comes with joy. It is not every household which can partake of its gladness and rest. There are many who are only reminded by it of what they can no more enjoy; many who are reminded by it of dear, familiar faces which used to make Christmas so happy, and which this year has taken away from their sight; many who must feel the more alone in their sorrow that they see all round them rejoicing. There are many to whom it but wakens up grief afresh, and opens again their half-closed wounds; many over whose heads the bitter hour of anguish and parting is even now passing, while we are singing, without any weight on our minds, our Christmas hymns. While we are gathering together to worship, others are fast bound in their dull, sick chambers in pain and heaviness. While we are cheerfully meeting, and resting round our firesides, without anything to weigh down our hearts, elsewhere fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, are hanging over the hopeless sick bed, and taking the last, long farewell. This is what this Christmas time is to them. Why, my brethren, should it not be so to us?

Let it then be something to thank God for, over and above, and beyond what the whole redeemed world have to thank Him for. And let it bring more tenderness and gentleness into our hearts towards our brethren round us. Who knows when they, who knows when we, may have to spend a darkened and mournful Christmas? So full of uncertainty and change are even the holiest days and seasons in this mortal life. So mingled and weighed down with the burden of our sorrows and our sins are even the

gracious days of refreshment, which have the savour of heaven in them, while we remain here in the flesh. Even they are not exempt from being spoiled by what is of the earth. Even the glad remembrance of our redemption in its brightest time must be mingled and overcast with the clouds of life. Even while rejoicing in Christ our Saviour, we are reminded that we are sinners, and must pay the penalty of sin. So it must be till life triumphs over death, till mortality and sin are swallowed up in the perfect victory of grace. Raise your hearts then to that day of brightness and glory; that day when the brightness shall have nothing to darken it, and the glory shall only change to greater glory. Raise your hearts and desires to that day of peace, when, in the presence of the Prince of Peace, it can never more be broken. There, only there, is the end of your salvation. Now you are but on the way to it, with many blessed resting-places and seasons of refreshment and strengthening from time to time on your journey; but with work and labour, with patience and trial, not rest and rejoicing, for your main portion now.

The office of such times as this is to lift you above this earth to the thoughts of your eternal home; to carry you on from the goodness and love of Christ already shown on earth to His love in heaven. Let then this Christmas help you, as He means it should, to think of meeting Him there. May you so learn to sing on earth the song of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men," that you may be fitted to sing, with those heavenly spirits from whom

you learnt it, that new song which is sung only in heaven—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing, for ever and ever, Amen."

VI

THE LIGHT AND ITS RESPONSIBILITY

“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”—ST. JOHN viii. 12.

EPIPHANY means manifestation, showing forth, making plainly and clearly known. The Epiphany of Christ our Lord means the showing forth, in one way or another of the presence, the character, the power, the work of Christ to certain persons, or certain classes of mankind. “The Word was made flesh,” says St. John, “and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” There St. John speaks of the showing forth, the unveiling to human eyes, of the glory of the awful and divine Person who was made Man for our sakes. And what we are reminded of at this time by the services of the Church is, that Christ not only came into the world, but that from a very early time after He came into the world He began to show who He was. In spite of the darkness and secrecy which were upon His birth and first years, He early began to let His light shine forth. While yet a child His star brought the Wise Men from the east—Gentiles,

standing as the first-fruits and figures of all the Gentiles—to see Him and to worship Him. Here was His first showing forth, as the appointed Saviour of the Gentiles. It was the little light in the east, springing up before the dawning of the day, before the sunrise and the full spread of the brightness of the dayspring through the world. And we dwell on this point in our Lord's history with so much interest just for this reason, that it was the first pledge of what makes the gospel that divine and comfortable thing which it is to us ; namely, that it is a hope, a source of light and grace for the whole world, a promise, that Christ came not only to be the glory of the chosen people Israel, but to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, to be for salvation to all the ends of the earth.

The Epiphany, then, the showing forth of Christ to the Gentiles, as the Saviour of the whole world, is a memorial of God's mercy to us, as great and solemn as Christmas itself. It is especially the Festival of Light. It tells us of the light which has been given us. It tells us that the secret which for ages hid God and His dealings from all but the people of Israel, has been for us explained and made clear. The darkness is past. The veil is taken away. The cloud has opened, and we behold in Him who was born King of the Jews, the Saviour, the Brother, and the Judge of every child of man. Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people. But the Lord has arisen upon us, and His glory has been seen upon us. And from that time we can never forget Him—the world can never again be without the knowledge of God in Christ.

The mystery which had been hid for ages and generations was now made clear. God had from the first been preparing to save, not only the one people who knew His Name, but the numberless families and nations which had not known Him. From that time forth, from that fulness of time when God's purposes were ripe, and He had sent forth His Son to be the Light and Hope of men, from that time forth the knowledge of God has been in the world, widening and increasing from land to land, from age to age, till it has reached even to us. And we have been born under that light from on high. We have grown up under its guidance. We live in its brightness. The dark world is made glorious and fair and safe by its beams. And when we die it sheds its reflection on our faces, and its ray of peace on our graves.

This then is a thing to think of at this season. We are in the light. That is to say, in plain words, to us has knowledge been given of the greatest importance, and the greatest comfort, concerning God, our souls, our duty, our end, and our hopes. We have the gift of light, of heavenly light, of light from God, to guide and support us in the path of life. The clouds which so long shut out heaven from the race of man in former days, which even now shut it out from the heathen world, have for us been removed. All that can possibly be known of God on earth is given to us to know, is made our portion, our familiar possession. Beyond what has been manifested to us of God and Christ, and the things to come, man will know nothing while this world lasts. God's last revealing of Himself has been

made. All the light which He has seen fit to give us has been already given us. There is no more to be waited for ; no other Sun of Righteousness will rise upon mankind ; no other Epiphany of the Redeemer of souls, no other Christ will come. All is done that God meant to do. And in that gift of the light, which must last this world till it gives place to the light of the other world beyond the grave, in that great gift of light we have been ordained to have our portion, to pass our days, to fulfil our trial, to discharge the trust which God laid on us when He gave us a living soul. By this light we may be saved ; by this light we shall be judged.

What then are we doing with this light which God has vouchsafed us ? This is the question which to every one of us has a very serious importance. For to all of us, more or less, the light of God's truth and hope has come. It has been freely offered to all ; and none can say that they have been able to escape the responsibility of the heavenly blessing.

It is a practical question—not difficult to understand at any rate. What good is your knowledge of Christ doing you ? You are not ignorant of Him. Many, perhaps, have but very imperfect and confused thoughts about who He is, and why He came, and what He has done, and why they need Him. But that is because they have not chosen to listen or to inquire about great matters of which all the world knows the importance, and which are not hidden away in a corner from any man. Light is in the world. We all know that light is in the world, whether we ourselves, personally, choose to come to it or not. Light is about us, shining in our eyes

if we go abroad out of our houses ; still shining all round us even if we choose to darken our dwelling-places, and shut it out. But we most of us own the light, we know and feel that it is about us ; we acknowledge the truth which God has made known to us ; we don't try to run away from it, at least openly ; we are content and even glad to find ourselves walking in it. The words of grace are not strange to us. The days and seasons, too, which bring the other world before us, and what they have done for us who are now in this present world, bring to us no strange and unwelcome message. God's name is ever sounding in our ears. Using the light which He has given us, we know what it is to ask Him for help, for forgiveness, for grace, for life. We know who it was who came from heaven to live for us, to die for us, to rise again for us. By the light which He has given us we comfort ourselves, even by the side of the grave, with the belief in the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting. Light from God shows us what is right when we go wrong. Light from God is our blessing and our comfort amid the troubles of life and the darkness of adversity.

Having then so much light, acknowledging so much light, as most of us must do, let us not be unfaithful to it, by letting our lives go on as if we had it not. All this light, all this knowledge about God and Christ, and everlasting life, was given us for very serious ends. It was not given us to satisfy the curious wish of knowing more. It was given us, that knowing what God is like in His ways and thoughts, we might follow where He

leads. It was given us, that knowing how God lived, and spoke, and acted, when He came down on earth and was made Man, we might learn to shape our lives by the example of Jesus Christ. It was given us that, seeing far beyond the grave, seeing far into that everlasting life which is prepared for the immortal souls of men, we might think of this world only as it deserves ; that we might be able to resist the temptations of its pleasant sins ; that we might bear with patience the trials and evils which are but for a little while, and which are here because they are needed to make men what God intended them at last to become.

Let us then remind ourselves of our great advantages, our great responsibilities, in having had that clear knowledge given us, which has let us see where we are going, and with what hopes. "I am the light of the world," says our Master ; "he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." That is the promise ; that is why He not only came, but showed Himself, in all His true glory, to mankind. God and Man, He goes before us, showing us what is true and what is good ; showing us that power which is over all things, and against which nothing can stand ; showing us that love, which refused nothing for the sake of mankind, and which has prepared glory, without end or measure, to be man's crown and portion. Following Him, the darkness which rests on the life of man is dispersed and driven away. But to follow this heavenly light, we must receive His light into our hearts and souls.

There, it must drive out the darkness of evil deeds and evil thoughts. There, it must make the conscience clear, and able to face the thought that God is watching, and that all is open to Him. To follow the light of Christ, while we are still wrapped about with the darkness of sin and the love of things unlawful and wicked, is impossible. "This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now . . . and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

Let us then at this time think of the great unveiling of Christ to the world, the great Epiphany, which was foreshadowed when God's Son was discovered to the Wise Men of the east. What that signified is to us accomplished. Here, to us, God has destroyed "the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory." Let us not have this great light in vain. Let us not walk like men who are still in the dark, and uncertain about their redemption, their judgment, and their destiny. We who have beheld the light, we who have learnt who Christ is, and what He is to us all, how ought we to stir ourselves up more earnestly day by day, to seek the light, to live as the faithful and true only can dare to live, with the feeling of its brightness shining on our path. And the time

is short for all of us in this world. Jesus says to us as He said to those of old, "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light." And let us remember the warning that follows, the warning to all who hear of Christ's light, and love darkness rather than light. "These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide Himself from them." May we never lose that light by our sin and carelessness. May it lighten more and more about our path here, till it leads through the last dread darkening into the everlasting light of God.

VII

THE STORM ON THE SEA

“And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but He was asleep.”—
ST. MATTHEW viii. 24.

WE read this morning¹ in the Gospel for the Communion service the history of Christ stilling the storm on the sea. In going across the Sea of Galilee, as He used often to do, a storm came on. He was with His disciples in a little ship or boat. “And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves.” Every one else on board was frightened and disturbed by the danger and the confusion; all but the Lord: “He was asleep.” In their terror the disciples forgot whom they had on board. They forgot all the miracles of saving and healing, all the proofs that they had One with them in whose company they must be safe. They only thought for the moment of themselves; they came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, “Lord save us: we perish.” Then He awoke. To them He spoke words of encouragement and gentle rebuke, as we chide our children when they are foolishly afraid:

¹ The 4th Sunday after Epiphany.

“Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” To the storm He spoke His word of command, and it was still. “Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.” But the men, we are told, marvelled, saying, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!”

They did not yet know Him. They had, indeed, seen many of His wonderful works. They had heard Him teach and speak as man never before had taught and spoken. They had heard the Baptist’s testimony to Him, as the Lamb of God, the well-beloved of the Father. Yet they did not fully know Him. For it takes time fully to know any one. It takes time to know all that is good, all that is great, all that draws forth our love and confidence in a person. If a person is very good, it takes time to be accustomed, and to make sure of the goodness before us. If a person is above the common in gifts and powers of mind, however striking and remarkable they may be, still it takes time to get accustomed to them, to understand them, to believe them. So it was with the followers and companions of Christ. Though they saw His miracles they could not at once take them in. They thought Him great and wonderful at the moment of doing the miracle, and when it was over, and a day or two old, they began to look on Him once more as one like themselves. It took them a very long while to learn who, indeed, their daily Companion and Master was. It was only by slow steps and a long experience that they came to find it out.

Hardly, while He was with them on earth, had

they come to the full knowledge of Him, though they were soon to see things as wonderful, or more so, than the stilling of the tempest on the lake. Hardly, even after He was risen, did they know Him aright. It was only after the Holy Ghost had come down on the day of Pentecost that their eyes were opened to the full, and they learnt in truth who He was who had been so long their Guide and Companion, their own familiar Friend. But now they were astonished at being saved. They were astonished that the danger, which seemed the moment before so dreadful, could pass away at His word. They were astonished that the power which they had seen before could go yet so much further in the way of helping them. They could not understand how the voice which was obeyed by sickness and by unclean spirits should also be listened to by the winds and waves. They marvelled, saying, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him!"

And so it is still. We cannot understand how Christ can be so powerful. Even when He has simply performed His promise we cannot understand how He could do so much. Before He helps us we say it is useless to hope in Him; it is impossible that He can save us. After He has helped us we look back and marvel that He can have been so gracious; that He should have exercised so much of His power in our behalf. It is one of the hardest things in the world to believe in earnest that He really cares for us; to believe, as He tells us, that the very hairs of our head are all numbered. If we did believe it in earnest what a different scene

would the world be ; what a different thing would life be to us ; what a different look would trouble and suffering have, and how differently should we behave in them.

But now, what is our feeling, our real feeling in trouble? Is it that we feel at once that we are in the hands of a loving and merciful Saviour, who is sure to take care of us ; and at last, if we trust Him, sure to bring us out of our trouble? Is it that, though the heavens look dark, and the wind blows fiercely, and the waves swell and rage and threaten to overwhelm us ; yet we know in whom we have believed, and feel sure that help will not fail us? Or is it not something very different? Is not our first feeling in trouble either to give up hope, to complain and be filled with anguish and vexation, or else to trust to ourselves or to some friend, some human aid, to bring us out of our trouble? Is our trouble sickness? We lose heart and spirit and give ourselves up ; or we think that we are hardly dealt with ; or we turn, sullen and darkened in temper, against all who are round us, envying them for being in such good health while we are ill, persuading ourselves that they do not care or feel for our sufferings and danger. Do we begin by setting firmly and strongly before our minds *who* has appointed the sickness ; who watches over it ; in whose hands it is to heal or make worse? Do we ask ourselves why it has been sent ; do we think that He who sent it will, as soon as He sees it to be best for us, take it away? Surely this would be the feeling and thought of any one who was really persuaded and firmly believed that God was

watching over him with fatherly care ; that Jesus Christ was with him though He seemed to be asleep. But I am afraid that very few of us seek to smooth our sick bed with such consolation ; few seek to keep up their heart in the midst of its trials by the remembrance of the words and deeds of Christ. We put Christ out of mind ; and then we have to meet the terrors of sickness either with only human hope and comfort, or else with nothing to support us against the storm which has arisen, and under which we seem to be sinking. We keep our thoughts only on our miseries, our disappointments, our dark prospects ; we let our souls grow gloomy and then bitter, all for want of believing what the Bible has so solemnly assured us of—that Christ is watching over all His disciples, and taking care of them, even when He seems to have left them to the mercy of the storm.

Or is our trouble that the world goes against us ? that we are straitened in our means of living ; that we fear we shall not be able to make our way as heretofore ; that we cannot lay up and make provision for our children ; that people talk against us, and are unjust or unkind to us ; that we cannot keep at peace, cannot avoid hard judgments and hard words, do what we will ? When these things happen to us, what is our first thought ? Is it of God, and that all things come to pass by His ordering ? Is it that He can save and deliver us out of trouble in one way if He does not in another ? Is it that He is exactly dealing out so much, and no more, of the bitter portion as He sees to be for our good ? Is it that, if we only trust and do not

lose patience, it will all come right at last? Or do we not, at first, think of such things only as things with which religion has nothing to do; as things of this earth only, things which are out of place to be thought of in our prayers, things which we do well to be angry and vexed about? Is not our secret thought that God has no eyes, no care for such matters; that it is vain and foolish to try to seek relief from their burden, or to hope to escape from them, by laying them open in humble supplication at the throne of mercy? And yet, surely, on that throne of mercy is One whose eye watches them. While we are coldly or bitterly pondering over our hard lot, and seeing no hope of relief, no glimpse of light in all the darkened sky, there is One who is watching the sorrow and distress of all the world, who is not insensible to it, though He has seen fit to appoint its course.

Or is our trouble the loss of friends? Is it that we see those, without whom it seems impossible to live, within the jaws of death? Do we see the danger thickening and increasing slowly, day by day, each morning bringing worse news, each evening carrying away with it some shred more of our faint hopes? Is it that one loss follows another, that death seems not to be satisfied, that when we fancied ourselves insured, as it were, against further griefs by some one great one, others follow, according to the saying, that troubles do not come singly? Who indeed can help sorrowing? But of what kind is our sorrow? Is it not too often very like that sorrow of the heathen who know not God and who sorrow as men without hope? Is it

not too often a sorrow which utterly refuses to be comforted—a sorrow which will not believe that God can have meant anything good or kind by His fatherly visitation—a sorrow which thinks only of earth and the blessings of earth, and when they are taken away, has nowhere else to look? And why is this but because we cannot, will not believe that it is all God's doing, and that God loves us and cares for us even while He hides His face from us? Sad, indeed, and bitter is parting at the best. Christ Himself wept at the grave of Lazarus. But very different would be the sadness if we could but believe that death does not happen by chance; that He who wept for Lazarus, and at last raised him from the dead, has not lost His tender sympathy for the mourner and the desolate. Very different is the bereavement, sharp as its first pangs may be, when, in the storm which has, perhaps, destroyed our earthly hopes, we see by faith amidst the clouds that divine love which takes most tender care of those it chastises, and binds up the heart that in mercy it has broken, which keeps safe in its heavenly shelter the precious things which it has taken from us. There is such Christian sorrow; there are bereavements felt like iron entering into the soul, yet borne with a calm certain trust in the love and presence of Jesus Christ, which keeps hope alive, and can find in it a strong consolation when all is over with what has been pleasant in this world. There are persons who so fully believe in the sympathy and wisdom of their Master, Christ, that they can give up their dear ones to Him—not without tears and sighs, but without a murmur,

without a thought of despair—who, giving them up to Him, only feel that now they are all the more safe; now they are all the more sure to be found again, if only they themselves can so pass through the storms of this troublesome world as, at last, to be counted worthy to be of that blessed company to whom Christ shows His face.

There are persons who bear sickness meekly and hopefully, who do not lose heart and spirit in their troubles, because, in the storm which has fallen upon them, they are sure that Christ is taking care of them; that though He seems to sleep, yet He is with them still. They have learnt His lesson. They have understood what He meant to teach us when He caused this miracle to be recorded. He meant to teach us, not that we were to look to be saved *from* the storms of life, but that *in* them, trusting Him, we might feel safe; sure of His watchful care, sure of His deliverance at the last. Why are we not of the number? Why do not we feel the strong safeguard of that guiding and sheltering hand on high, which, to Christ's true servants, is the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night? Why do we not have hope? Why do we go on without comfort? It is still the same sad reason. As it was with the Israelites in their hour of danger in crossing the Red Sea, as it was with the disciples on the stormy waves, so it is with us. "O ye of little faith"; there is the whole reason. We are told—we are assured by God—we have His promise, His miracles and wonders—we have the experience of His servants; yet we will not believe. We will not believe that in truth God watches over us, and

appoints our daily lot, our daily trouble, our daily mercy, our daily deliverance. We will not believe that God indeed loves us, and that Christ, who died for us, lets nothing come upon us which, in His all-knowing wisdom, He does not see necessary and good for us. "Carest Thou not that we perish?" is not the cry of strong faith. But it is more than we can very often attain to. We cannot get ourselves to believe that God and Christ care anything at all about us, or that they know and think of what is going on round us, and making us sorrowful.

Oh that we would pray more earnestly to God to increase our faith; to make us believe and feel in very earnest the great and comforting things which He has told us, of His watching over us and caring for us, and appointing all things for us; and of His willingness to help and save to the uttermost those who come to Him by His dear Son. Then, at least, in the day of trouble we should think of something more than the mere earthly and temporal look of the trouble; we should think of God in it, of God guiding it over our heads, and able to shelter us in it. Then when we were sick our thoughts would not be so taken up with the mere pains and annoyances we suffer, the probabilities or the improbabilities of our getting back to our old state of health and strength. Whether we are to get better or worse, the remembrance of the hand of our Saviour in it all would make us feel easy under it, as no other thought can.

And so with other troubles, great and small, which are the waves of that sea of life which is seldom quite calm, and which often swells into

mountain billows, in which it seems that our ship must go down. At least if we could have so much faith as the disciples! They had not indeed faith enough to stay quiet in the storm. They did not remember that the promise of their Master, though asleep and not heeding them, was enough to preserve them. But at least they had faith to believe that He could save them, if called upon and awakened by their prayers. They had faith enough not to give up hope while they had Him to pray to ; and not to put this hope in any one but in Him. In the storms of life, if we have not faith to be without fear, at least let us have faith to cry unto Him. He may rebuke us, but He will listen and save. "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" Then, in His own good time, He will arise and rebuke the wind and the sea, and there will be a great calm.

VIII

MAN'S ORIGINAL CREATION

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness : . . .
So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created
He him ; male and female created He them.”—GEN. i. 26, 27.

TO-DAY is Septuagesima Sunday, that is, the seventieth day or thereabouts before Easter. And with to-day begins a change in our services, and in the thoughts which are brought before us, by what the Sundays and holy-days remind us of. We have left Christmas behind us, and look forward to Easter. We have, as it were, beheld by faith Christ born, Christ circumcised, Christ manifested to the Gentiles, Christ growing up, first a child, then a boy, then a man ; now we are to behold Christ tempted, Christ fasting, Christ in the toil and suffering of His work, Christ dying, Christ rising again. We have thought of Him in His gentleness, His innocence, His childlike gladness, coming to bring gladness and goodwill to men, humbling Himself to be understood and rejoiced in as the little Child, even by children. Now we are to watch Him in the awful greatness of His man's work and life ; a work, a life, a death, to make all who see it serious, if anything can make

them serious. At Christmas we had before us simply His love and condescension. Now we are also to have before us all the things which His love made Him do and endure for us; but with that, we are to have before us too our own sins and ill-deservings, our own ruin and danger, on account of which He had to labour, and suffer, and die.

One of the things which marks this change in the time is the change that is made in the first Lessons from the Old Testament. Hitherto, that is, from Advent till now, they have been taken from the great prophet Isaiah,—the prophet who foretold with most wonderful clearness, and in such exalted strains, the times of the gospel and the sufferings of Christ: the glory which should follow the endless goodness of God to all nations, and the awful terribleness and unspeakable hope of the coming of the Day of God. From the prophet Isaiah we read of the Virgin who should conceive and bear a Son, and call His name Immanuel; from him we know of the Child who unto us was born, the Son who unto us was given, who was also the mighty God and the Prince of Peace. From Isaiah we heard of the Gentiles worshipping Christ; from him we heard of the wonderful story, told hundreds of years before Christ was born, of the sufferings and sacrifice of the Man of Sorrows, who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, who bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. But to-day there is a change in these Lessons. To-day, all of a sudden, we go back to the beginning of the Bible, to the book of Genesis. We turn back

from the promises of the world to come, to the history of the world which now is. I should think the change must strike every one; the change from the inspired poetry of the prophet, full of the magnificence of that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart imagined, of the blessedness which is to be, to the plain bare account of how the world and man were made, and how man ruined himself. Henceforward, for a long time to come, we shall hear no more in these first Lessons the glorious words and hopes of the prophet. We shall have to read a history, which is for the most part a history of man's sin; the history, indeed, of God's mercy to him, of God's long-suffering and abundant goodness, but also of that long-suffering sorely tried and provoked, of that goodness abused and disappointed.

Now this change in what is chosen out of the Bible for us to read in Church is made for a reason; and the reason is a very plain one. We are going at this time to commemorate and dwell upon our Lord's great acts in our redemption: in Lent, to think of His fasting and temptation; in Holy Week, of His agony and bloody sweat; on Good Friday, of His cross and passion, His death and burial; at Easter, of His glorious resurrection. But it will be of little use thinking of these things, unless we also think what part we have in them, and how they concern ourselves. And how do they concern ourselves? They concern us, because we are sinners, and because they were done to save us from the ruin into which we had fallen. Therefore while we are going over

the scenes of our Master's love, we, at the same time, go over the scenes and the likenesses of our own disobedience ; while we read of what Christ did to raise and save us, we read at the same time of how low we were sunk, and how far we had wandered, and how hopeless would have been our recovery if left to ourselves. All this is set forth in the clearest and strongest way, in the early books of the Bible, in the book of Genesis and those that follow. And so we now turn back to Genesis that we may read about ourselves, at the same time that we are reading of Christ's goodness to us. The object is to make the two histories run side by side, to set them one over against the other ; the history of sin and the history of redemption, the fall and the recovery, what man forfeited and what he was restored to, what he was of himself and what God's love did for him.

So to-day we are carried back to the beginning of all things. And the Bible carries us back to that strange and incomprehensible time, not for the purpose of satisfying our curiosity about it, but for the purpose of showing us about ourselves, and what is our business in this world which God made by His great power. Why did God make us ? What were we meant for ? This is the great question of questions to every soul born in this world ; and all the world and its history is of importance to a man only so far as it helps him to answer this question right, and to understand its meaning. What is it to us that there are sun and moon and stars, what is it to us how they were made, what is it to us who made them, except

so far as they belong to Him who made us: except so far as they make us know something about Him who sent us to pass our lives under them, and to help us to understand the glory of Him who must have had some great purpose in creating us with life and reason, and a soul that is not to die? The Bible and Genesis begin at the beginning, not to make us comprehend exactly how the worlds were made, for that, even if it had been fully told us, we could not have comprehended; but to tell us why God made *us*, and what were His purposes in creating the race of mankind.

We know, alas! but too well, what we are now—we, and our brethren, and all mankind; on us, and the best among us, on those whom we love the dearest, on us all is the sad stamp of sin. On us all, in body as in soul, there is the unmistakable mark of fallen creatures, creatures who are not what they might be. It is of no use trying not to see it; evil is bound up in all we do; it comes out in what is best among us, and meets us at every step, in ourselves, and in all round us. And this great and dreadful truth is what will have to be kept before us, in one shape or another, in all that we are to read from the Bible in the weeks that are coming. The love of Christ on one side, but on the other, the truth about mankind, and that truth is the bitter truth of our sin and disobedience; the still more bitter truth how, do what God will, we still cleave to our sins, and seem hardly the better for His love and warnings.

But now that the Lessons of the season are going to dwell so much on the sin of our nature,

now that, in one shape or another, it is to be brought before our thoughts as the subject of Bible chapters and sermons and services, the subject to be held before us in public, and thought upon with humiliation and repentance in private, it is well to remember another side of the matter. It is well to remember that we are sinners; but it is also well and most needful to remember that our stock was not always sinful. What we have become is only too plain. How Scripture speaks of our downfall and ruin is, as we all know, sadly and awfully clear. But Scripture does tell us something more. Scripture which tells us that we are sinners, tells us that sin was not always in our bone and blood; tells us of a goodness and innocence and excellence which was once ours, and which is even yet, in spite of all our corruptions and miseries, the true model after which the soul of man was made.

Thus, before we begin to read in Genesis what man became, we read in Genesis what man was when first made. Before we have to read of his sin we have to read of his original perfection. Now that our thoughts are to be so much on the sad history of the world, they are first, by way of preparation, carried back to that first point which is never to be forgotten, even in the depth of our shame and humiliation—back to the great truth that we were made in the likeness of our Father in heaven. "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him." That is the reason why we begin this season by reading to-day those two first chapters, which show us, darkly indeed,

and as in a glass, the first glorious state of man. Here, whatever else may be difficult to understand, two things at least are clear—what was God's purpose and meaning in creating man, and what was the state in which he was at first. He was at first without sin ; he was at first fit to be called the son of God ; he could live in the presence of God, and listen to His voice, and speak with Him as his Father, unafraid and unashamed. He had his Father's likeness and image on him. He was fit to be chief over the works of God in this world. God made him for good, made him for righteousness and blessedness, made him for life. God made him to be the crown and perfection of His own glorious works. That is the reason why the six days' work is told us at such length. God made the light and the sun, and they were very good. He made the seas and the mountains, and they were very good. He made the fishes of the water, and the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field—all that wonderful creation of life, which, dull and unbelieving as we are, daily more and more excites our endless wonder and awe and praise—and He saw that it was all very good. He made the herb of the field, everything that grows, everything that lives on the face of this beautiful and glorious world, and all was very good. But of all this good the end was not yet reached. There was still something better to be made. Great lights in the firmament, and stars beyond the reach of the thought of man in the depths of space, sea and mountain, green tree and gay flower, tribes of living creatures in the deep

below and the deep above of the sky, four-footed beasts of the earth in their strength and beauty, and worms that live out of the sight and knowledge of all other creatures,—these were all as great and marvellous as we know them to be; these were all said to be “very good” by that voice which had called them into being. Heaven and earth were filled with the majesty of His glory. But they are counted up, one by one, because they were not enough for Him to make, not enough to satisfy Him by their goodness. He reckons them all up; He pronounces on their excellence. But yet there was something which they had not reached to. There was something still to be made, which should be yet greater, yet more wonderful, yet more good than they. There was a beauty which, with all their beauty, they could not reach; a perfection which, with all their excellence, they were not meant or made to share. They declared the glory of God, but not His likeness. They displayed the handiwork of His wisdom, but they shared not in His spirit, His thoughts, His holiness. So, after their great glory, comes a yet greater glory. The living soul, like unto God, had not yet been made. Then said God, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” *There* was made the great step from the wonder and beauty of the world, to the creation of man, with a soul and spirit more wonderful, more excellent, than all the excellence and wonders of the world, because it was made in the likeness of that great and holy and good God who made the world.

That is the great truth which is at the head of

all that the Bible tells us of mankind and of ourselves. That was what we were meant to be, and sent into the world for. That was what man was originally. However deeply he may have fallen, that is what he fell from. That was God's design in making him. And never, in the lowest state of shame, in the depths of our consciousness of our ruin and degradation, never ought we to forget the greatness of our birth, and the glory of our intended condition. For it is because of that His first purpose, to make man in His own image and likeness, that God has loved our race so deeply, that He has taken so much pains to recall and restore us to our lost glory and excellence. It is because we are not utterly debased and fallen from that likeness, because with all the mischief that sin has wrought, the stamp of that first creation is still seen in our souls, that God "so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish," but should have that eternal life which He had meant for us from the beginning.

Here then is the subject for our thoughts to-day. Think, from what you have heard in the first chapter of Genesis, what God made you for, what He sent you into the world for. Man has indeed spoiled His work, but not destroyed it. God's purpose still remains, fallen and ruined though we be. His purpose still holds for you. Of you it is true that you were created in the image and likeness of God, however the inherited taint of a hundred evil generations may have disfigured that image. It is to restore that image, in even greater beauty,

that His Son died for you : it is to raise you once more to that likeness, in a yet more perfect and higher measure, that His grace has been given you. Oh, think of what God meant you for, and take courage, and be lifted up above the miseries and the trifles of this present world. Think of God's great design in giving you a living and understanding and loving soul—that He meant you to be on earth the living likeness of His unseen goodness ; and trample under your feet the sins and temptations that keep you down, that would drag you from the image of your Father, down to the foul and frightful likeness of the lost angels, the spirits of darkness.

God meant you for better things. God meant you to be more excellent than any created things you can see on earth. Sound to its depths, pry into its mysteries, soar to the furthest bounds of its most distant star—He meant you, with your living spirit, your divine gift of reason, your heart of sympathy and love, your power of being holy and just and righteous, to be greater and more wonderful than all these. And will you disappoint Him? Will you refuse to be restored, now that He has done so much more to raise you back to where you fell from? Will you, for the love of this world, and its short pleasant sins, reject the gift of being made like to Christ, and give up the promise of endless life in that true presence of God of which the Paradise of Eden was the faint shadow?

IX

THE GREATNESS OF CHARITY

“But the greatest of these is charity.”—1 COR. xiii. 13.

THERE is no Christian grace or duty spoken of in the Bible in the way in which charity is. There is none about which a set chapter is written, describing all about it, as if it were the subject of a treatise or lecture. There is none which is put at the head of all other things required of a Christian, and declared to be that without which everything else is worth nothing. There is none, of which the separate parts are, in a way, taken to pieces and set before us one by one. There is none which is spoken of as charity is, as something which lasts beyond this world, as something immortal and never perishing, while other great Christian graces are only of use to us in this life. Charity is the special grace and goodness which the gospel holds up above every other kind of goodness, and which distinguishes Christ's genuine religion from every other creed and religion known in the world.

You know how St. Paul speaks of it. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels . . . though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all

mysteries, and all knowledge . . . and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal . . . I am nothing." Putting that into other words, into words which suit our own experience and times, he says: You may be as clever as you like, you may be wise and knowing, and able to understand what other people find hard and puzzling; you may be clever in matters of this world, by which men get on in this world; nay, you may know all about the truths of religion, and be able to talk of them wisely and well; you may be able to explain them to others; but all this is of no use to you if you have not this great thing besides, which St. Paul calls charity. All your wise words are but empty noise; in the sight of God you are of no use; in His sight all you do is not worth a thought—*you are nothing*. That is a strong thing to say. But St. Paul does not stop at that. We know how faith is spoken of in the Bible. It might be thought that if a person had faith, then at least he must be a good Christian, he must have genuine religion, and must be pleasing to God. It might even come into people's minds that if a man had faith, *that* might make up for other wants. But no: "Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains"—faith to give strength to do the greatest and most impossible things—"and have not charity, I am nothing." That is St. Paul's view. We know how much St. Paul in other places speaks about faith. He was the great preacher of faith. But when faith and charity are set side by side, you see of how little account he makes faith; you see how great a thing that charity must be, which is greater even than faith, and without which

that great gift of faith is useless. But he goes further still. It might be thought that if a man does good and excellent works of mercy, is zealous for God's truth, and willing to be a martyr for it, and be put to death for the name of Christ, that then, at least, he must be something in God's sight. It looks like showing his faith by his works. That, if anything, would seem to show genuine religion. But St. Paul is very bold. They are indeed remarkable words in which he winds up what he says about the absolute necessity of charity. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." I may do good all round me; I may be bountiful, liberal, open-handed, even to my own hurt; I may actually make myself poor, in order to be a benefactor on a larger scale, and make the poor bless me; nay, I may be so brave, so public-spirited, so careless of death, as to face the most terrible dangers, and throw away my life for the cause that I think right; and yet, whatever be the reason for which I do all this, if I have not charity, it is all—kindness, bountifulness, self-sacrifice—thrown away, as far as there is any reward for it from God.

These are strong words indeed, by which St. Paul would make us understand the exceeding importance and necessity of having what he calls charity. Nothing can make up for the want of that; neither knowledge, nor good sense, nor religious profession, nor faith, nor liberality, nor even readiness to face danger and suffering and death. And he goes on to tell us a second point about charity as compared with other points of excellence. Charity,

he says, is for evermore. Charity lasts beyond this world into eternity. When we enter into life everlasting we shall still need to have charity just as much as now; charity will still be the great excellence and grace of the saints made perfect, as it is that of the saints still passing through their trial in the flesh. All other Christian graces will come to an end, because in heaven there will no longer be any use for them. There will no longer be need for faith; because what will be the use of faith, when we shall see with our eyes what now we can only believe in? There will no longer be need for hope; because how shall we any longer have to hope for our blessedness when we have actually obtained it, and are enjoying it? Faith and hope are of a state of things imperfect. We believe, because we cannot yet see. We hope, because we are yet at a distance from what we hope for. But when what we hope for is come, we shall hope no longer. When our eyes are opened to the glory of God and heaven, we shall no longer take God's promises on trust, for we shall *know*. Faith and hope will be left behind us here. Not so charity. Charity is something that is to go with us beyond death, and to rise again with us when we rise again. The words and messages of God to us will no more need to be thought of. They will do their work in this world; they will uphold the hearts and confidence of those for whom they are given; they will be fulfilled. And then, having answered their purpose, there will be no more room for them in the new and eternal kingdom of God, for which they have prepared the way. The work of prophecy will be over

and then there will be an end of it. So the knowledge which God has given us in this world, both of Himself, and of all other things which belong to this present state, that shall be no more remembered when we come to that world, where all that we knew in this life shall seem like the knowledge and the trifling play of children, compared with the knowledge and business of men. Now we see and know but in part. Now we see things darkly reflected as in a looking-glass; we see not the real things themselves, but only their dim and broken shadows; now all that we know seems like a riddle and a puzzle to us. But then we shall see face to face; then we shall know even as we are known. So then, all that is of this world we shall leave behind us. Prophecies, though of God—inspired words, though from the Spirit of truth—shall cease their office, and become of no further use, and be laid aside. We shall no longer want a Bible to teach us; it will give way to something better. Whether there be prophecies they shall come to an end; the great gifts of God shall no longer be wanted to teach and convince, to persuade, or comfort. “Whether there be tongues, they shall cease.” The knowledge that has been so precious to us, the gracious gift of God manifesting Himself to man, shall be swallowed up in the blaze of light, by which we shall see all things new and in perfect truth in heaven. “Whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.” But charity never faileth, it never comes to an end, never ceases to be of the same use that it always was. And so, while there are three great excellences always necessary to us as long as we are here—though these remain and

abide as the prime requisites for the Christian life, these three, faith, hope, and charity—yet, of these, the greatest, because the only lasting and eternal, is charity.

What then is this charity which is so great a thing? Perhaps it is unfortunate, though there were good reasons for it, that the word "charity" should have been used just in this place, instead of the word, which, in almost all other places of the New Testament is used to translate the original Greek word—namely, love. When St. John says "God is love," the word in the original is the same word as is here translated charity. When our Lord says "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," "love" here is the same word as charity. When St. Paul says "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts," "the love of Christ constraineth us," it is the same word and with the same meaning, as what we here read of as charity. You must remember that wherever you meet the word "love" in the New Testament, you might use the word "charity" instead of it; and wherever you meet the word "charity" you might use the word "love" without making any difference in the sense. Now if you think of all the times that *love* is spoken of in the New Testament—the love of God to men, the love of men to God and to their brethren—you will not need to wonder at the way in which St. Paul here speaks of charity. For charity is love—neither more nor less.

Nothing, then, can make up for the want of love; and, again, love is the one thing in the soul and heart of man, which will be the same in him in this

world and in the world after death ; the one thing which he is to carry with him, if he is blessed enough to be counted worthy of the presence of God. When we know that *love* is what is here meant by *charity*, we hardly want St. Paul to explain more what is so fully explained and insisted on all through the gospel of Christ. But he does go into it and explain it; and he gives us such an explanation as may help us to try our own hearts by, and to judge of how much of that love there is really in them.

A great deal might be said about it. But there are three points which I think stand out in the description which he gives of love or charity. What he means by *love*, is something in the heart and temper of a man, which (1) thinks and wishes good, even in return for evil ; which (2) is the opposite to thinking much of ourselves, whether in the way of being covetous and selfish, or in the way of being proud and conceited, and lifting up ourselves as better and worthier than others ; and (3) something which shrinks from, and hates what is wrong and evil, and has no pleasure in it. When he says, for instance, that love is long-suffering, love is good and kind, love is not easily provoked, love beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, there is no mistaking what kind of spirit he is thinking of. It is that spirit of goodness, which makes God bear with our provocations, be patient to our unthankfulness, be long-suffering with our sins ; it is that spirit of kindness which makes Him cause His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and send rain on the just and on the

unjust. It is that spirit of meekness which made our Lord return good for evil, endure patiently the contradiction of sinners, hold His peace when He was unjustly accused, show His pity and mercy on all who come to seek it, and make allowance for the weakness, the ignorance, the folly, of those to whom He came to minister and to do good. Without this inward spirit and temper of goodness and kindness, without the inward wish and effort to think well and feel kindly, to bear with what we do not like, to keep ourselves from ill-will and harsh judgments, we have not charity, we have not love. And St. Paul tell us that whatever other good things we have or do, without love in the heart, they are nothing.

Again, when he says, love envieth not, is not puffed up, does not vaunt, or push itself out of its proper place, does not behave itself unseemly, rudely, unbecomingly to its station, does not seek its own—that which it might fairly claim—what a warning is there against ways of feeling and acting, which are but too natural to us all. How often do we feel envious and grudging against some neighbour, who in one way or another provokes our jealousy! How often openly, how much oftener in our hearts, do we feel pleasure in setting up ourselves above others, as better and worthier—perhaps as being worthier of favour and honour, and yet, nevertheless being worse treated! Who has not to fight for ever—or else he is the bond-slave and captive to it—against the evil spirit of selfishness, against the way of putting ourselves first, so as to shut out what is due to others—of expecting everything to be well and fairly done

by others, while we do as little as we can ourselves? We may deceive ourselves; but if we will listen to St. Paul we can make no mistake about the matter. Where there is pride and jealousy, where there is self-seeking and covetousness, where there is only following our own pleasure without minding what comes of it to others—*there* there cannot be charity.

One point more. Charity does not think, and meditate upon, and plan what is evil; does not rejoice and delight in iniquity, but rejoices and sympathizes with what is true and righteous. It is the love of all that is pure, and noble, and beautiful, and good, in what men are and what they do. It is a turning away with disgust and abhorrence from all that is mean and vile and mischievous, all that is corrupt and corrupting, all that is crooked and double-faced and dishonest, all that is impure and unrighteous and unholy. It is the love of what God loves; which can bear evil and even wrong, but can never see sin and iniquity without being grieved and vexed by it, even as Christ hated and condemned sin, though He so patiently endured all that sinners did to Him, though He was so ready to forgive them when they repented, though He loved them well enough to suffer and die for them, even in spite of their sins.

This then is that thing which St. Paul tells us is greater and better than knowledge or power, or great deeds of benevolence and generosity, or even than faith and hope—a love like the love of Jesus Christ, a love like that of God our Father. It is better to be of a forgiving spirit than to be wise

and clever. It is better not to think evil of others than to have the highest praise for doing good. It is better to be patient and long-suffering than to understand all knowledge. It is better to give up in secret our own wishes and pleasures for the sake of others, than outwardly to be ready to suffer trouble and loss, and, at the same time, to be obstinate and self-satisfied, and to think oneself good. Love is the only thing that makes us like our Master Christ. We may be powerful and wise and do great things in the world, even for the benefit of mankind, and yet be utterly unlike Christ if we have not Christ's charity. We cannot really have true and sincere love without being in a measure like Him. God, we know, is love. And Christ humbled Himself and became Man that we might see what the perfect love of God is in a human soul and heart. In His words and in His deeds, and still more in His manner of doing His deeds, you may learn that most excellent gift of charity. He came to teach it us, and He does teach us in a way that the simplest cannot mistake. No one can think that Jesus Christ thought first and most of Himself, of His own profit, of His own credit. No one can think that He was puffed up with pride, or jealousy, or hatred of others. No one can think that he thought lightly of sin and transgression. No one can think that He vexed others by carelessness or rudeness, that He judged harshly or hastily, or without good cause. We can only have charity if we try to be like Him, and if we have not charity we may have everything else to no purpose. Without charity all

our doings are nothing worth. Without charity, whosoever liveth is counted dead before the God of truth, and goodness, and love. "It is eternal charity which is the bond of all things in heaven and earth ; it is charity wherein the Father and the Son are one in the unity of the Spirit ; by which the angels are one in heaven ; by which the Church is one on earth."

X

LENT THOUGHTS

“We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”—HEBREWS ii. 9.

THE forty days of Lent begin next Wednesday. Let me say, in a few words, what they mean, what they remind us of, what they are meant to prepare us for. The forty days of Lent continue up to Easter day—the great day on which we call to mind how our Master Christ rose from the dead, and triumphed over sin and evil. The forty days of Lent therefore are a preparation for Easter day. And they bring back before our thoughts how Christ Himself prepared for that great victory of His. Here we have, cut out from the rest of the year, and set apart for greater solemnity and even sadness, a month and somewhat more. The rest of the year has its bright days and its dark days, has its fasts and feasts, has its holidays and its days of sorrow, seriousness, repentance, grief. But they come, one with another, mixed up together and mixed up in the midst of common days, common week-days, common Sundays. But Lent is a time taken out and made somehow different in its ways and feelings

from the rest of the year. And its ways and feelings are grave and serious ones. Lent is fenced about with a kind of solemnity that even the world is obliged in some degree to respect. It is called a time of fasting. And even if people do not literally fast, they feel that the words of the gospel, which call upon us to deny ourselves, must then, if ever, be considered ; that something ought to be given up ; that we ought to make some difference between it and other times ; that even if we do not deny ourselves, we ought to respect the feelings of those who do, and not force our gaiety and mirth on them when they are thinking more seriously than usual of the serious things which our life has to do with. So, I say, Lent is fenced off from the rest of the year. It seems different. We don't like to do many things in Lent which we do at other times. And the particular thing about it is, that it is a time reminding us, day after day, of repentance, of sin, of sorrow, of the gloom and punishment which sin and disobedience have brought on our lives and our hopes.

Now, how did Christ prepare for His victory at the resurrection? He did so by taking out of His everlasting life, the life of glory and bliss which He had for ever with the Father, a certain space which He gave up to self-denial, to humiliation, to pain and want, to suffering, to shame, to death. Christ spent something more than thirty years on earth. All that time was so much time cut out of the glory which He had in heaven. His proper life was one of endless, infinite, unutterable blessedness. So it had been from all eternity, before He came down to be born on earth. So it has been and ever will be from

the day when He ascended up to heaven, through all eternity to come. But between the eternal glory before and the eternal glory after, He took out and fenced off thirty years; and for what? That He might take on Him, and taste to the full, all man's condition; that He might know all his woes, all his sorrows, all his wants, all his infirmities; that He might be a fellow-sufferer with us; that He might know all that comes on man by sin, and feel what waste sin has made in the happiness of mankind; that He might feel our burdens, and ease them by taking them all—sin, and sorrow, and shame, on Himself. That was what He cut off those thirty years for, out of the blessed life which He had of His own. He was to conquer death and sin. But He gave Himself thirty years to prepare for His great battle with it, and His great triumph. And the thirty years were thirty years not merely of seriousness, and self-denial, and abstaining from the natural things of other times; but thirty years of the deepest and bitterest humbling and trouble.

Lent reminds us then of Christ's earthly life; the life taken out of His heavenly and eternal life; the life that He specially gave to us, and in which He endured so much; the life in which He gave mankind lessons in heavenly love, such as they had never had before. In that life He chose to be afflicted and cast down, and cut off from what was His own, to be despised and put to grief that He might minister to our necessities, and heal our sicknesses, and comfort our sorrows, and forgive our sins. He would cheer our despair, and hold us up when we are sinking, as He held up Peter, and He would teach us how to

love as they love in heaven. Lent reminds us, year by year, how Christ took a certain time out of eternity, out of His own blessed life above, to give it to sorrow and humiliation for our sakes, to prepare Himself for the victory and joy of His glorious resurrection.

This is one thing that Lent comes to remind us of. You all of you know another thing. The forty days of Lent are appointed because we read that Christ was forty days in the wilderness tempted of the devil. They are the continual witness to us of this great and strange thing, that Christ our Lord was tempted—yes, tempted by the great enemy of mankind. He was tempted as the devil tempts man; not once and again only, but through a long month and more, continually left to the devil to assault, and vex, and buffet. What is it to be tempted? It is to be supposed to be ready and willing to sin; ready and willing to yield to the enticements of the world, the flesh, and the devil; to be supposed too weak to stand against the fears, the pains, the mockery, which can be brought against a man. It is to be supposed to be of such a nature that with a little playing, a little humouring, a little ensnaring, a man may be brought to sell his soul for something of this world, for something that the devil's service can give him. To be tempted is to have all these things—things dreadful and things pleasant to flesh and blood—spread before him; to be driven to make a hard choice; to see on one side all that one could wish for, and on the other, the stern command of God and duty and conscience to leave it all alone, to give it all up. To be tempted is to have all those things

that seem pleasant waiting on one little word, one little step—say, *yes*, and you have them; stretch out your hand and take the tempting fruit, and you have it. And there may be nothing at the moment to warn you, to remind you, that to do so may be death. To be tempted is to have one's soul torn, and rent, and dragged hither and thither; to be like a man engaged in fierce and deadly wrestling, to be driven about like a ship in a storm, to be walking through fire or through deep waters, struggling desperately, now here, now there, to find the dim and distant way of escape.

Of Jesus Christ our Master it is written, that He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin . . . For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted." Strange and awful words—words which we cannot get to the bottom of; for we cannot understand how one who was God as well as man could be tempted, could have weakness and infirmity as we have; could feel all that makes to us the real power and danger of temptation. Yet so it was. And in the gospel we read some of the temptations with which the devil plied Him. And we know that the struggle was as hard and painful as it is to us when we are tempted. It is of this wonderful and consoling part of our Lord's ministry, then, that Lent reminds us. It reminds us that He was a sharer, not only of our griefs and of our death, but also of what we feel when we are tempted—tempted by the pleasures and fears of this world, nay, when we are tempted by the devil himself. It reminds us that Christ did humble Himself so far as to partake of and learn by

— feeling all that poor weak men endure, all His life are in danger from when they undergo that great trial of their goodness which we call temptation. He so laid aside His strength that He took on Him our infirmities. He so laid aside His majesty that the devil was not afraid of Him, and took Him for another Adam, easily to be overcome. He descended to the depths of pain and death; but more than that, He descended to the depths of the agony and struggle of the soul, to the very edge and risk of defeat, though He could not suffer defeat. For we are told in the clearest words that “in all points” in which we are tempted, He was tempted too. And He was tempted, yet without sin, that He might make us believe that we too may be tempted, and yet may by His strength conquer.

Here then are the two leading thoughts about the meaning of Lent. Lent brings back to us that Christ set apart, and cut off from the glorious life which is His own, a certain space in which He gave up everything—peace, glory, honour, bliss, that He might work out our salvation. There was a time in His long endless existence, devoted to His being humbled, and tasting every sorrow, and feeling every pain. And next, it reminds us that He who is our Saviour and Lord not only shared our life and our death, our weakness and our troubles; but that He was in very earnest, really and truly, made to endure temptation—made to be tempted by the devil himself, as the devil tempts the sons of men.

With these thoughts in our minds let us welcome the Lent that is coming. Surely it is reasonable for

disciples of such a Master, to set apart and cut off from the common days of the year a time which shall force on their minds how Christ cut off a time from His blessedness, to go through the hard and sorrowful work of winning the salvation of the world. Surely that work was so great and so serious, and cost so dear, that it is but natural to have some particular time to be serious and grave about it. Surely, at such a time, it is but natural and reasonable to make a difference from ordinary times; to keep from things which are the proper and natural things in the ordinary days and months; to school and restrain our minds and hearts, that we may really take in and understand and feel all that Christ underwent, all that He gave up for a time, for our endless good. "I refrain my soul and keep it low," says the Psalmist; and we have much more reason to do so than he had. We want, not merely to know as a mere fact, but to realize, to make our own, to enter into, the great work and doings of Christ. We want to understand and feel the things on which our good and evil in this life depend—the things that Christ did and suffered for us. We who are ever in the midst of temptation want to feel in the depths of our souls and consciences the consoling certainty that, indeed, in our temptation, Christ Jesus sympathizes with us; that, indeed, He can and does do so, that He has good reason to feel for us and with us, because He too, once on earth, suffered being tempted. And, I believe, that nothing will help us to do all this so well as by making this use of Lent—refraining our souls and keeping them low—that we may enter into what Christ did,

when He kept His soul low, and humbled Himself, and cut Himself off from all that was His for our sake—so making a difference between this and other times of the year, that we may make and feel a difference in our thoughts and feelings towards the great and blessed Saviour who had, who still has, such love to us and to the world.

May He pour His grace into our hearts. May He help us to make a right use of times and seasons, of calls and opportunities, of memorials and tokens of His wonderful goodness. May He incline our hearts to wish to follow Him in His path of humiliation and self-denial, in His readiness to give up the present, the immediately pleasant and tempting, for the sake of that much greater hope which is to come. And, by whatever means, may He, at any rate, print deep in our hearts the remembrance of His sufferings for us, and faith in His power to save. May He help us to become more and more like Him in the lives we lead, and in our resistance to temptation and sin, so that in our death we may be able to take comfort in His death, and in His rising again, and in His coming back, though it be to judge us, when all is ended.

XI

THE CASTING FORTH OF THE BONDMAN

“Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.”—GALATIANS iv. 30.

THERE are two awful voices sounding through the whole of scripture—the voice of acceptance, and the voice of rejection and forfeiture; the voice which proclaims God’s election, His choosing men for blessing, for special grace, for unexpected mercy, without any merits of their own; and the voice which proclaims that He has tried men and found them wanting, that they will not do for what He requires, that He has been patient with them in vain, and will wait no longer for their perverseness, that they have received life and a soul, and have thrown them away. There is the voice which opens the gate of mercy, and the voice which declares that it is shut; the voice which welcomes the faithful servant to his reward, and the voice which excludes the unfaithful and the unfit from any further chance. And both these voices are equally awful ones.

St. Paul is here speaking of the rejection of

the Jews. Under the figure and allegory of the two children of Abraham and their two mothers he sets forth the two covenants, the two religions, the two Churches, which in those days were before men's minds. There was the old covenant and religion and Church of the Jewish people ; there was the new covenant and religion and Church of Jesus Christ. The Jews claimed to be God's people because they were the descendants of the patriarch, and had the book of God's law, and had been so often visited in deliverances and chastisements by God Himself. They thought nothing of having refused to listen to the Son of God, of having rejected and slain Him. And in their own old history, St. Paul finds their likeness, and the likeness of their rejection. Abraham had not one, but two sons. True, the eldest might at one time have thought that he was the inheritor of Abraham's promise and blessing. But it was not so. The eldest was the son of the bondwoman Agar, and to her God had given no promise. Her son seemed for a time to come into the place of Abraham's promised child ; but it was not to be so—that was not God's counsel. There was still remaining after Agar's son was born the promise of a son to Sarah the free woman, the true and lawful wife. And in due time the promise was fulfilled, and the true heir, the true son of the promise, was born. The son of the bondwoman rebelled, and claimed what he called his right as the eldest son. But God's word was plain and stern. "Cast out the bondwoman and her son : for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free." So,

St. Paul argues, it is now. The Jews are the eldest son. But their connection with Abraham is a carnal, outward, literal one: and *that* connection they are so satisfied with that they will hear of no other; of no spiritual, inward, heavenly one, far above anything of this world. They have misunderstood God's words, God's mind, God's meaning, and His promises of mercy. They have tried to set up what was outward, and but for a time, in the place of the truth which God has sent to redeem and purify the souls of men. They have rejected Christ's mercy. Their time is over. They are no more God's chosen people. They would not bow down their pride to become God's spiritual children in the Church universal of Jesus Christ His Son. They have forfeited their high estate. Their own scripture pronounces their sentence of rejection and expulsion—"Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free."

This, I say, is an instance of one most awful side of the Bible; which is as strongly marked in it as that side which speaks of God's invitations and merciful grace. It is as certain that God rejects as that He accepts. It is as plainly and strongly set before us in the Bible that there is really such a thing as forfeiting His mercy, and being cast out, cast away, as it is plainly and strongly set before us that God's gifts and calling are wonderful in their boundless grace; and that there is indeed such a thing as a faithful and triumphant service of God of which the endless blessedness is sure. David was chosen and accepted;

Saul was rejected, and with no hope left for him. Jacob, unworthy as he was, inherited and preserved the birthright of blessing; Esau threw it away, despised and sold it for a mess of pottage, and then found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. The Bible all through is a record of blessing, and also a record of judgment; and the words of judgment are as strong and plain as the words of blessing and promise. It shows us God choosing the unworthy, pardoning the sinners, welcoming the penitent, inviting the weary and heavy-laden, saving the perishing, strengthening the helpless, watching over the weak, encouraging the tempted; giving grace to the true-hearted, making strong His soldiers, rewarding His servants, and making all things work together for good to those who love Him. But the Bible also shows us, on the other side, how sure and how great is His wrath when His wrath is kindled; it shows us God judging the unfaithful, bringing their own ways on the head of sinners, taking away blessings from those who have abused them, bearing long but at last bearing no longer, giving up the obstinate to their self-chosen ruin, separating with a final and endless separation, between those who refuse to obey Him, and those who do His will, between those who love darkness and sin and wrong, and those who have come to Him for mercy, and have believed His Word.

So here. "What saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman." What saith the scripture? It

says it not for the rebellious Jews only, who have perished in their love of the bondage of superstition, and sin, and worldliness. The voice, the verdict of scripture is one which extends to every age ; which speaks the certainty of truth about the eternal rules of judgment by which God deals with us all, and will deal with all men to the end of time. What does scripture pronounce? It pronounces the sentence of rejection against the bondwoman and her son ; it declares that the bondman and the freeman cannot be joint-heirs in the same inheritance.

It is the sentence of rejection from Christ's religion, from Christ's promise, from Christ's reward ; it cannot be changed. It is no arbitrary or wanton judgment ; it is founded in the very nature of things, in the very nature of right and wrong, of holiness and sin, of truth and the eternal law of God, in what must be. The bondman must at last be cast out ; the bondman cannot inherit with the freeman. And we know very well who, in the language of Christ and of His apostles, is meant by the bondman, who will not be the free man. He it is whom Christ cannot make free because the love of sin is too strong ; he who is a captive to Satan and the powers of darkness ; he in whose heart and soul evil has set up its throne, and beats down the good and rules over the whole man ; he who does wrong and knows that it is wrong, and yet in spite of his conscience goes on to do it ; he in whom the love of this world is so strong that he has no power to lift up his soul to think of things above this world, of the love of Jesus Christ, and

of that unutterable loss which remains for those in whom there is no love or fear of God ; he who blinded by evil thoughts and wishes, by the shows and delusions of this short mortal life is snared and entangled by false appearances and lying hopes, and cannot rise up to behold and own the truth ; he who is the slave of bad customs, of foolish fashions, of mocking words, of the laugh and jest of wicked companions, of vain and empty fears ; he who knows that he ought to think of his immortal soul, and his coming death, and his certain judgment, and cannot get himself to do it ; he who knows that he ought to try and understand the will of God and to do it, and who lets the evil ways he has got into prevent him ; he who knows how divine and glorious a thing the freedom of Christ is, and yet is too careless, too idle, too cowardly to bestir himself to seek it. Here is the bondman—"the son of the bondwoman" of whom the scripture speaks. It is not for such as he that God has given His promise and opened His door ; for such as he God's kingdom has no place, His inheritance no share. The decision, the sentence must come at last, and it can come only in one shape. "Cast out the bondwoman and her son : for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman."

It will be well for us to think seriously of the great truth shadowed forth in these words ; the truth, for it is a truth, that in the dealings of God with men there is an exclusion, a forfeiture, a rejection ; that there are unhappy men and women who may fail in their trial and come short of what

God requires, who, when proved, may be found wanting, and who, therefore, at the end must be cast out, refused, condemned, ruined. If there is the free man, the free man in Christ, who is to share his Master's heritage, there is also the bondman, the slave of sin and the captive of the evil one, who is to expect the heritage, make sure of it, and forfeit it. No one need remind you that the gospel is a gospel of grace ; but we do need to remind ourselves very often, that it is also a revelation of the wrath of God and an assurance that there is such a thing, such an awful, tremendous thing as forfeiting the mercy and the hope which alone can enable any one to look forward into eternity.

The bondman will miss it. He who is satisfied with the selfish ways which pass muster now ; he who is so wrapt up in his self-conceit, so satisfied with his goodness that he needs no righteousness, no forgiveness, no grace, no light, no improvement from Christ and Christ's gospel ; he who is beset and entangled on all sides with the cords and bands of sin, like a bird in a net, and will not make the serious, earnest struggle to break through. While he is as he is there is no room for him in a religion of truth, of freedom, of faith in God, of sanctification. Come to the Redeemer and Deliverer and He will enable you to break your bonds ; but while you are in your bonds, and love them and cling to them, and will not let them be broken, the bondman cannot be a sharer with the free. And when this world's trial is over, unless the bonds are broken and the man is no longer a

bondman, "What saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son."

Free men indeed. Alas! how few can claim the glorious title. But we need not be bondmen—we may be strugglers for freedom though we have not yet won it. And God counts as free men those who are wishing to be free, and are manfully fighting the great battle of their soul's freedom. The bondmen are those who are contented and well pleased with their chain. Never let us be this. The battle of freedom may be a hard one. It very often has been a most desperate one. But if ever it is a hopeful, a certain one, it is when a man fights earnestly and with all his will for the freedom of his soul, for the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free. He need fear no rejection. The forfeiture, the shutting out of the bondman is not for him. As long as he is in honest truth "striving against sin," and earnestly following after truth and goodness, the Spirit of Christ is working with him—the Spirit of the Son, who can make men free indeed. For such an one the scripture speaks not of the doom and ruin of the bondman, but of that for which "the whole creation of God groaneth and travaileth in pain together": of that, of which every honest effort and desire for goodness is a prophecy and promise—of the deliverance "from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

XII

HOLY COMMUNION

“But we preach Christ crucified.”

“As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till He come.—1 COR. i. 23; xi. 26.

IT is sometimes asked, and, still oftener perhaps without being asked in words, questioned in secret, why so much is said about persons coming to the Lord’s Supper. Why is this Sacrament spoken of as being so especially holy, and necessary, and solemn a thing? Why does the Prayer-book in its order of services make so much of it? Why do the ministers of the Church speak so strongly and earnestly about it; and urge their people, as they value their salvation, to turn their serious thoughts to the duty of coming to it? Why is it put forward, and in so high a place, as something which is binding on us all as Christians; as something of higher and deeper comfort than any ordinary prayer or worship; as something which is quite by itself, and with nothing like it or to compare with it, in its heavenly dignity and heavenly savour; as something which, far more than united prayer and praise, seals and completes the communion and fellowship of Christians with each other, and of all

with their blessed Redeemer? Why is it spoken of as something in which His grace, His forgiveness, His divine love flows in larger and richer streams than in any other rite and solemnity of the Church; as something which has more in it of awful and divine mysteriousness—a mystery of unfathomable blessing, or to those who profane and use it unworthily, a mystery of far more than ordinary sin; as something which brings us into a closer approach to our God and our Saviour, which introduces us into the reality of an unseen presence of our Maker, and the awfulness of His immediate neighbourhood, more than any other act of prayer and faith? Why, it may be asked, is all this? Why is this the common, rooted, inherited belief of Christians, the belief received from their fathers, the belief received from times beyond remembrance, the belief which even they who do not value the Sacrament yet inwardly and really acknowledge in their hearts as that which keeps them from it, as giving it an awfulness and divine dreadfulness which they dare not, with their careless lives and their sins not resisted, face and meet? What is it that makes this Sacrament the greatest, chiefest, most solemn of all Christian acts of worship?

I will answer this question by another question, which will give the answer to the first. What is it, in the whole scheme and plan and system of Christianity which fills the first and the largest place? What is it—among all the wonders of grace and mercy to man—which the gospel shows us is the most gracious and the most merciful? What is it to which all other parts of the gospel point, from which

they all receive their meaning? What was it to which everything in our blessed Lord's ministry on earth led up—in which all that He did and said was finished and summed up—from which all the benefits of His salvation take their rise, as from their spring and fountain? What was it to which all things in the old days of the patriarchs, of Moses, and the prophets looked forward as their end and completion? What was it which gave value to their sacrifices, which was foreshadowed by their figures, which was the substance of their types, which fulfilled their prophecies? What, again, was it that, after Christ had come and gone, His apostles and preachers for eighteen hundred years have ever looked back to as the sum and substance of that good news which they had to declare to the world that it might be saved? What great theme filled the discourses of St. Peter and St. Paul in the Acts of the Apostles? What is that mystery of love and glory which is the centre of all their teaching in their epistles? What, in one word, is that one all-exceeding marvel, that one overwhelming mystery, that one chief and supreme event, which is to the rest of the gospel what the sun is to the day, the point where light and glory are collected in all their perfection and majesty, and from which they spread themselves far and wide? What is that one great truth? What is it but "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified"? What is it but the sufferings and death of Christ, with all their unfathomable depths of wonderfulness, with all their unimaginable consequences of love and grace? What is it to which everything comes that the Bible tells us, and to which every

word of the Bible has reference but this—the death of Christ?

The death of Christ—this is the great truth of truths in the gospel, the great wonder of wonders, the finishing and perfect proof of that love of God to us, beyond which we can conceive nothing higher. All in the gospel rests upon it; without it the gospel could not be understood. From the cross of Christ streams all the light which makes the gospel the message of peace and comfort to sinful and dying men. Jesus Christ has died for us. In His death our sins are taken away. In His death is our hope of life. This is the never-failing source of instruction, of exhortation, of encouragement, of warning, throughout the epistles. “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” “God commendeth His love toward us, in that, when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” All reconcilement with God, all hope of being brought nigh to God, depends on that one great sacrifice, which is ever held up before our eyes, to humble us in the dust, to inflame our love—that sacrifice where the innocent died for the guilty, where God gave His life for man. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.” “God so loved the world,” is the great message of the gospel, “that He gave His only begotten Son, to the end

that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "This is a true saying," repeats the apostle after his Master, "and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." And when we are asked how He saved them, the thoughts of every one at once go back, beyond His birth, beyond His miracles of mercy, beyond His lessons of holiness and truth, to the tremendous mystery of His cross and passion. That stands out, in clear and unequalled light, in the pages of the Bible, as in the thoughts of Christians. "I lay down my life for the sheep." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

If there is new force and power in the appeals of St. Paul, above the words of all others who have ever preached godliness to man, it is when he speaks of the gospel mystery of the death of Christ. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." If he has strength and boldness to dare what other men never dared, to welcome suffering that others shrink from, he finds it in the cross of Christ. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." If he dares to hope

for what none other before had dared to hope for, to raise his thoughts high above all earthly wishes or fears to a portion in the Kingdom of God, eternal and infinite, he rests, as for his foundation, on that pledge and assurance of love manifested without stint or measure, in the death of Christ. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" "We preach Christ crucified," was St. Paul's own description of the gospel. He preached many things; he spoke of many great and small; he taught many doctrines; he showed many duties; but all were summed up in that from which all derived light and power, and their greater than earthly authority and meaning, the cross of Christ. And so he would say, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

You see, then, what I need hardly have told you, that if there is one thing which is the sum and centre of all we are taught, and all we hope for in the gospel, it is the death, the cross of Jesus Christ. And now, then, to go back to where we began. We began by asking, Why is the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper made the principal thing in Christian worship? And I said I would answer the question by asking another. What is the principal thing and truth in the Christian's faith and religion? And we cannot doubt what that is—the death and sacrifice of Christ. Here, then, is the answer to the question. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the greatest of Christian services, because the death of Christ, of which it is the memorial, is the greatest of Christian

truths. Because the death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the truth of truths in the gospel—that upon which all others depend for their meaning; that which gives grace and efficacy to all that Christians believe and all that they do, that from which their forgiveness, their holiness, their eternal life, all flow—because the death of Christ is the central and chief doctrine of the gospel, therefore, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the chiefest and holiest and most blessed of the ordinances of the gospel.

This is the real reason of that peculiar and awful dignity, without equal or likeness in any other religious ordinance, which, to the eyes and feelings of us all, surrounds the Sacrament—*The Sacrament*, as we commonly call it, from a feeling of the distance which there is between it and any other part of our worship. This is the reason why so much stress is laid on it; why Christians are so earnestly exhorted to prepare themselves, and to partake of it; why the Christian profession is not judged complete without it; why it is set forth as offering blessings not to be gained elsewhere and without it; why the neglect of it is urged as so clear a danger and sin; why in the hour of extremity, of darkness, of suffering, of death, we naturally turn to it as a pledge and means of superhuman help and comfort. It is because it is the remembrance of that which is greatest and mightiest in all that the Bible shows us, most full of power to save, most full of love to touch and melt us—the death of our Redeemer and Lord. It is because, whenever we eat that bread and drink that cup, we show forth

the Lord's death till He come. It is because, as we are taught as children, the Lord's Supper was ordained "for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and of the benefits which we receive thereby." It shares, it reflects, the pre-eminent glory and greatness of that divine cross and passion which it shows forth. Something of the unspeakable and heavenly awe, something of the unspeakable and heavenly blessings, which belonged to that sacred death, when it was suffered for us on the cross, descends on the Sacrament which is its memorial and representation, and spreads from it through the hearts and souls of men on earth. It is what has been appointed and left behind to be the perpetual and unchanging witness to sinners dying and in danger, to sinners weak and yearning after a peace which they cannot find on earth, of that Body which was broken, of that Blood which was shed—the ransom of their souls, the healing of their wounds, the peace-making and atonement between God and man. Not like the brazen serpent in the wilderness, not like a mere picture or image of the Crucified, not like any outward memorial or sign of that death which changed the face of the world, the fortunes of mankind, the prospects of the undying soul—not like that; but an assurance and token, not devised by man but left by the Redeemer Himself, which speaks to the soul through the visible sign when the action and the words of Him who died for us are repeated; and not a token and pledge only, but a real channel and means by which the purchased gifts and blessings of that death are

given to us, by which we are fed with that broken bread, which is the sacrificed Body of the Lord, by which our souls are washed and sprinkled with that precious Blood, which was shed for the salvation and cleansing of the world. In the Sacrament we are brought close, as it were, to the death of Christ, to its awful mystery of love and judgment, to its endless treasures of grace and life; we are brought near to what is holiest and most precious in the ministry of the incarnate Son of God for the redemption of souls. And because the death of that incarnate Son is the chiefest and greatest of all that He has done for us, the Sacrament, by which we are brought near it, which is its token, and memorial, and witness, and by which we are made partakers of its benefits, is the chiefest and most excellent portion of all our worship.

And knowing what the death of Christ was, knowing how it is held up before us in scripture, how can we wonder that, being so great a truth, so great an act of saving love, we should be meant to have it always before us in the most solemn part of our service? It was not as an ordinary rite of prayer and praise that the Sacrament was appointed. It was appointed that there might be something specially appropriated, specially calculated, to bring home to us and impress us duly with that great and awful fact, that our Lord has died for us. Such a truth deserved and required a memorial to itself; one fitted in the greatness of its unequalled solemnity, and in the recollections belonging to it, to answer duly to the greatness of that which it recalls and represents. And not

only recalls and represents and impresses on our minds. For it was appointed not only to hold up before our minds the thoughts of Christ crucified, to make us feel as we ought in the remembrance of His dying love, but also to carry into our very souls the fruits of that divine sacrifice. It was to bring Christ's death not only before us, but near to us, home to us, into the depths of our own personal needs, our own personal sins and personal weaknesses. It was to bring us into fellowship, into real and living union with Him who had died for us. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion," the partaking, the receiving to ourselves a share and portion "of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" "Then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood; then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ and Christ with us"—Christ who was crucified for us—Christ in the breaking of His body and the shedding of His blood—Christ the Ransom, the Sacrifice, the Atonement, the High Priest, the Mediator of mankind—Christ the Lamb of God, who was slain to take away the sins of the whole world.

Here then is the reason why so much is thought, so much is said of the Sacrament. Here is the reason why we try so much to give you a true feeling of its greatness and value. You know as well as we do that our salvation depends on the satisfaction and the death of Christ crucified. Can you wonder that we make so much of what has for its sole end and purpose to make Christians

remember as they ought that precious death? Is it strange, that believing as we all do that the death of Christ is the greatest truth of our faith, and that all hope and blessing flow from it, we should earnestly invite you to do honour to that death by coming to that Sacrament, which the dying Master appointed to bring home the feeling and the blessing of His death to the hearts of men? It is because it flows from Christ's death, because we can trace it up to the very hour and agony of His actual suffering, that the Sacrament is so divine and great a thing. It is a link which joins us, through the distance of ages, with the offering of that broken Body and streaming Blood; at one end of the unbroken chain is the Master in the upper room, the sacrifice expiring on Calvary—at the other end is our communion table, the actual bread which we break and take and eat, the actual wine which we pour into our chalice and drink "in remembrance of Him." You know that on Christ's death our hopes must stand or fall. Have you then such a clear and strong feeling of it; are you so deeply and constantly impressed with the greatness of that untold and unutterable love; do you find that the death and sacrifice of the Redeemer is so perpetually present with you, that you need nothing to remind you of it; nothing—even of what He Himself has left you—to impress the remembrance of His love on your minds, and to inflame and strengthen in you that return of love which ought to constrain you to follow Him? How can we hope for the benefits of Christ's death, if we have not sufficient

feeling and value for such an awful sacrifice? And how can we expect to have that feeling and value for it, if we neglect the means by which our Lord meant to keep alive our faith in it, to touch and impress and kindle our hearts with it.

Think then upon this. As the sacrifice and death of Christ is the greatest, if we may so speak, among Christian truths, so the Sacrament of the Lord's death is the greatest among Christian ordinances. And the reason of the greatness of the Sacrament is the greatness of the truth from which it flows, of which it is the witness and pledge, with which it is joined in all our thoughts of it, and in the blessings which we hope for in it. Because we hope in the death of Christ we are drawn to remember it in the Sacrament. Because the love of Christ crucified is the salvation of the world, we thankfully embrace that which is on earth its never-changing token. Because we wish to have a part in the benefits of the Redeemer's death we humbly come, trusting to find in the memorial of it which He left us some communion and share in those benefits. Because we believe that Christ died for us, and that without that death we could not have salvation and peace, we come to that Sacrament, where that dying is brought before the eye of our souls with a solemnity, with a depth of impressiveness, with a sense of personal interest, with breathings and whisperings from heaven, as it is brought before us nowhere else.

Oh! in this time of His passion and cross, will He not put it into the hearts of some of those who have hitherto neglected the great remembrance of

His death, how much they are losing, how much they are giving up, how much peace and blessing they are throwing away? Will He not put it into their hearts to consider and see whether they can value and be trusting in His death, while they will not come and join in the remembrance of His death? Will He not put it into the hearts of the old how much they want the comfort of being brought closer to His cross and death? Will He not put it into the hearts of the young, of those who have just been admitted by confirmation to the greatest privilege of Christian discipleship, to resolve to seek, in that holy Sacrament, to know something more inwardly of Him who died for them; to "know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made comformable unto His death; if by any means they might attain unto the resurrection of the dead"? Oh, if He is even now whispering in any heart here that they might, that they ought, that it would be their blessedness and comfort to come, think once more of Him who loved you, and suffered for you, and gave His Body to be broken and His Blood poured out that you might be forgiven, that you might be happy and have peace; think once more of this depth and mystery of love, even unto death, before you make up your minds that you will turn away from His invitation, that you will not come. Think what you miss and are losing by not coming. Think what you may hope for by coming. Come, and behold by faith, more solemnly, more touchingly than you have ever beheld before, your Redeemer dying. Come, and learn to behold by faith, while you feel

the calm and solemnity of the Sacrament, those arms outstretched on the cross to embrace you, that tremendous oblation and sacrifice lifted up between heaven and earth for your sins. Come, and in the holy hour of communion with the Crucified, hear Him speaking individually to your own soul from the midst of His agony and shame: "Come unto me, all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." Listen to Him giving Himself to you, applying to your soul especially the fruit of His redemption: "The body which was given for *thee* . . . the blood which was shed for *thee*, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life." Come and taste something that you never knew before of the depth and tenderness of His love. Come and feel, as you never felt before, that for you—for you yourself—the Lord of Glory died. Come and see, in faith, how it was all done. Come, and beseech Him by His cross and passion to have mercy on you, to comfort you, to receive you. "By Thy sweat bloody and clotted, Thy soul in agony, Thy head crowned with thorns, bruised with staves, Thine eyes full of tears, Thine ears full of insults: Thy mouth moistened with the vinegar and gall, Thy face dishonourably stained with the spitting, Thy neck weighed down with the burden of the cross, Thy back ploughed with the gashes of the scourge; Thy hands and feet stabbed through, Thy strong cry, Eli, Eli; Thy heart pierced with the spear, the water and the blood thence flowing, Thy body broken, Thy blood poured out—Lord, forgive the offence of Thy servant, and cover all his sins."¹ In that

¹ Bishop Andrewes' *Devotions*, Day VI.

blood wash me, by Thy body strengthen me, by those bruises heal me, by that cross lift me up from this world. By that dying cry receive my soul. In those sacred wounds hide, shelter, bury me, till, in the day of the resurrection, I may behold Thee, no longer veiled, and as in a glass darkly, but face to face, in Thine own glory.

O Lord, who in this wonderful Sacrament hast left us the remembrance of Thy death and passion, grant us, we beseech Thee, so to do honour to the holy mysteries of Thy body and blood, that we may be partakers of the fruit of Thy redemption; who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen.

*1/2 are all prisoners out in the rough & sea?
life!*

XIII

THE LORD'S PRISONERS

“For the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not His prisoners.”--
PSALM lxi. 33.

TO-DAY is the beginning of that Holy Week, which year by year reminds us of the unspeakable love with which our Maker and Redeemer has loved us, poor, miserable wanderers and creatures of a day. It unrolls before us, if we will follow it, the progress of Jesus Christ going to death, going to the death upon the cross, that we might be delivered from our sins and live. It holds up before us the tender compassion with which our heavenly Father has looked upon us from the beginning, how He has yearned after His lost creatures, what price He was willing to pay to bring us back, and to reconcile us to Him; how, when we were sinners, and haters of Him and His goodness, He yet longed after our return, as if that was necessary to make Him happy. Oh, let us try and lift up our hearts to Him, our gracious and merciful Father, in this time of remembrance of His wonderful goodness to us. Let us open our souls, and let the blessed words which tell us of His love find some place to rest in. Let us think what we are, and what we should have been

for ever, if God's love to us had not been greater than our sins ; if God's care for us had not been greater than our care about ourselves.

"The Lord despiseth not His prisoners," says the Psalmist. Who are the Lord's prisoners ? Who are they whom He keeps in prison, and yet, even in their prison, does not despise ?

All mankind were His prisoners ; for all mankind had done deeds worthy of death, and their sins had brought them into bondage and captivity. All mankind have come into the prison-house of sin, and Satan, to whom they had sold themselves, kept them bound. There was no going forth from that prison, no breaking out from that stronghold, no release from that hard servitude. God had in His justice appointed, that by the sins which a man had done, by the same he should be punished and held in captivity. All mankind had sinned and were in prison ; they were wandering up and down in the courts of the prison, when One came from heaven to visit them ; One who alone could comfort and help them ; One who alone was stronger than their jailor the devil ; One who alone did not despise the prisoners ; One who came with blessed words of hope in His mouth : "The Lord hath anointed me . . . to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." He came with a ransom in His hand sufficient to pay the redemption of all their souls ; and that ransom was His own blood.

We and all mankind were God's prisoners ; but besides this, God has His special prisoners ; those, who each for special reasons of their own have

been shut up and bound, and who even after Christ's redemption has come, are yet not loosed. There are the prisoners of sin—alas! the world is still full of them, though their Redeemer has shed His blood and paid their price. Those who still love and follow sin are in bondage. They think that they are enjoying liberty, but they are blind and know not where they are; they are in reality in a dungeon darker and more dreadful than those of the worst earthly tyrant; they are dragging a chain more burdensome and more woeful than the most miserable convict. God's justice watches over them, and keeps them as its prisoners; its prisoners now—waiting, if they do not turn to Him in time—to suffer the dreadful sentence of His wrath when the day of punishment comes. Such in reality are they; such are they in the sight of God and the angels, and even of the devil who tempts them; they who are now madly following the pleasures of sin, and despising God and His call to repentance. And there are other prisoners of sin besides these—those who began with sin, and have since got tired of it or afraid of it, and have tried to leave it off, and who find that it sticks to them like an evil disease, which they cannot get rid of. How long do the thoughts and evil wishes of sin remain in a man's mind, even though he has broken off from the evil deed! How difficult is it for those who have been once impure and unchaste, even in their thoughts, to become pure and holy in heart. How hard is it for the man who has got into a regular way of drunkenness to give up the accustomed company on the accustomed evening, or in his old

company to begin to be temperate, when he finds his health breaking, or when he begins to look with alarm on disobedience and death. These, too, are the prisoners of sin—God's prisoners for their sins. The chain is difficult to unfasten; it takes little to rivet its bolts, but the strength of a giant and the skill of many days is wanted to take out those rivets. The brand is easy to burn in on our souls; but when burnt in, who shall take away and undo that mark of shame and slavery?

And there are the prisoners of sorrow and trouble. These too, God keeps in prison; a prison less terrible than that of sin, but yet a prison. And when we are the prisoners of trouble and affliction, it is often as the punishment of sin. Thus the Jews were God's prisoners, when they were in captivity to the heathen for their sins. God brings men often into the prison of sorrow, that they may feel that they are also in the prison of sin. For, as I said, sinners do not feel that they are prisoners; the bondage of sin is one which men often deceive themselves into thinking is perfect freedom. But the prison of sorrow is one that they must feel; they cannot help feeling themselves prisoners when they are tied to a sick bed, when the strength and joy of life is taken from them, when those on whom they leant, and whom they loved are taken from them, when they find themselves hedged in with difficulty and poverty and debt, so that they know not where to look. Then they can make no mistake, then they know that they are prisoners; and if they are wise, they will consider that they are God's prisoners. But sometimes they are the prisoners of sorrow, not for punishment but for blessing—to

be kept out of the way of evil, to be spared the fierce temptations which come on those who are richer, or healthier, or more prosperous—to be chastened, and purified, and refined—to show forth God's power and grace in affliction, and to bear testimony to His goodness, in the midst of the fires. So was St. Paul in bonds God's prisoner—a prisoner of trouble and distress, of hunger and cold and nakedness—to preach the gospel of his Master, and to set it forth all the more fully, from his prison in Rome or Cæsarea, and with his chains on his hands. Such prisoners of God, such ambassadors in bonds, are many; who, cut off from all that makes life pleasant to us, yet hold up among their friends and in their households the example of a meek and believing patience; who stricken with illness, helpless and feeble, and with no more hope in this life, yet help and comfort and cheer all round them, by showing how to suffer without murmuring; and how to sympathize and rejoice with others, though, for them, the ties of the world are almost broken, and their day of joy is over while they remain here.

mission 7 God has other prisoners too; those in whom the fear of death and judgment begins to stir, to whom conscience is beginning to show the greatness of their sins, who are beginning to ask the awful question, What shall I do to be saved?—and who know not how to answer it, or whether it may not be too late even to think of receiving an answer. Those too are God's prisoners, who have often felt the terrors and perhaps the love of God, and, after having felt them, have turned their backs and shut their eyes, and gone back to sin and to the world:

those who are trembling on the edge, wishing to serve God, but afraid to take the first step, doubting between this world and the next, fearing to lose what they think so much of here, yet wishing to gain so much hereafter; thinking of trying to be religious, yet thinking that it would be dreadful to make a mistake and fall back again. And there are those who are groaning under the captivity and bondage of some great sin, and know not how to burst their bonds and get free; or those who have made their choice, who have resolved to come to their Saviour and to trust His mercy, but who feel themselves still walking like children with tottering and unsteady steps, and whose hearts fail them when they think of their own weakness, and of the greatness of the way. These are God's prisoners too; tied and bound with the chain of their sins, and not able to walk at liberty.

"But the Lord despiseth not His prisoners." He has His eye on them although He still keeps them in prison. He pities them, He makes provision for their wants, He is not ashamed of them, though they are but captives:—captives, most of them by their own fault; bondsmen, who have sold themselves into the house of bondage; debtors, who have loaded themselves with debts which they knew they ought not to contract, and would never be able to pay. Yet the Lord despises them not. No, not even those miserable ones, who are proud of their bondage, who think their prison a palace, who glory in their shame, who count their captivity and chains the most entire liberty. Not even these does He despise. For He came, for He comes still, to

seek and to save those who were lost. He is about their path and about their bed, to warn and call them back. He strives with their folly, He bears their rebellion, He gives them time and chances without number for repentance. He visits them in their prison of sorrow and distress, as He visited the Jews whom He had sent captive to Babylon. Even in Babylon, among their heathen oppressors, He is near them. Even in Egypt, while they toil in the brick-kiln, and gather stubble instead of straw, He is near them. Even when their task-masters oppress and bring them low, He is near them. Even when Pharaoh is most terrible in his wrath, Moses and Aaron, God's prophet and His priest, are by them. When for their sins they "sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, being fast bound in misery and iron ; because they rebelled against the words of the Lord, and lightly regarded the counsel of the most Highest"—when He had brought down their heart through heaviness, and they had fallen down and there was none to help them—yet, even then He is not far off; He is waiting, if they cry to Him, to deliver them out of trouble, to bring them out of darkness, and to break their bonds asunder. And if they are prisoners for His name's sake, and for His glory, still more surely will He look on them in mercy. He will be with them in the court of the prison as He was with Joseph ; He will stop the lion's mouth as He did for Daniel, when he was God's prisoner in the lions' den. He will walk with them through the fires, and the flame shall not kindle on them, as when One like unto the Son of God was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,

in the burning fiery furnace. He will send His angel as He did to St. Paul in bonds, and perhaps give them those who are with them; He will bring some careless one to seriousness by the sight of their faith and patience, and comfort and cheer some failing spirit by the high example of their trust in God.

So does God deal with His prisoners of sin, and His prisoners of sorrow, His prisoners of anxiety, and of desire, and hope. He despises them not. He takes care of them. He is making ready to deliver them in His own good time. And so does He deal with His prisoners of fear—those who are afraid for their salvation, and are cast down at the thought of their sins and of His righteousness. Oftentimes He leaves them long in prison. It is for their good. It is to break the stony heart. It is to save them from being proud and lifted up, and pleased with themselves. Oftentimes they cry bitterly in their prison-house, as if God had forsaken them. "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in a place of darkness, and in the deep. Thine indignation lieth hard on me, and Thou hast vexed me with all Thy storms. . . . I am so fast in prison that I cannot get forth. . . . I am in misery, and like unto him that is at the point to die. Even from my youth up Thy terrors have I suffered with a troubled mind. Thy wrathful displeasure goeth over me, and the fear of Thee hath undone me." So they feel with the Psalmist. God meant them so to feel. They are His prisoners. But only let them, like the Psalmist, "tarry the Lord's leisure"; and they shall find that they are not forgotten, not

despised. He will be with their souls even in the mire of the dungeon and the darkness of the prison-house. Little by little, they will find the light breaking in upon them. When it is good for them, the prison doors will open of their own accord, and they shall look back and understand with wonder the loving-kindness of the Lord.

Who can doubt it, who thinks of what we begin to commemorate to-day? Who can doubt that, indeed, He is a Lord who despiseth not His prisoners, when we fix our thoughts on the Lord Jesus treading for our sakes the sorrowful road to shame and agony and death, that by His stripes we might be healed, that we by His sorrow might be comforted, that we by His shame might be lifted up, that we by His bonds might be set free, that we by His death might look unto His cross and live. Oh, let us turn to Him now, if we are still in sin, if we are in trouble, if we are in sorrow, if we are weary and heavy-laden, if we are grieved and afraid for our sins. By His agony and bloody sweat He will not despise us. His pitying eye will not be turned away from us. His gracious ear will not be shut, He will not refuse our cry. Surely by His cross and passion, by His precious death and burial, He will deliver us.

XIV

THE CROSS ACCEPTED AS PUNISHMENT

“And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.”—ST. LUKE xxiii. 41.

So spoke the dying sinner who suffered with Jesus Christ; suffered with Him on the cross. Such was the better mind to which he was brought while he suffered with Christ; such was the expression of penitence and humiliation to which he had come by watching the cross of Christ, and seeing how Christ endured it, suffering wrongfully. For he had not always spoken thus. When first he and his fellow-sinner had been nailed to their crosses, it seems as if both of them had joined with their executioners in railing against Jesus Christ. Both, according to St. Matthew and St. Mark, sought a miserable relief from their tortures by pouring forth the bitterness of their agonized and hopeless souls on Him, whose meekness seemed to reproach their fierce struggles against their doom. They could not bear to see Him so patient and so silent, while they were burning with hatred against those who were punishing them, with hatred against those who were looking on safe and unharmed on their own

shameful death, with hatred against God for having disappointed and cut short their course of sin. It was the last evil pleasure of scorn and malice which those wild robbers could enjoy, now that their own hands were hindered for ever from doing mischief, to see one suffering all that they suffered, who yet was innocent. But though they both began with railing, they did not both continue. St. Luke completes the history of which St. Matthew and St. Mark had only told us part. He tells us that one of these malefactors ended by becoming on the cross the disciple of Jesus Christ—ended by receiving from Christ's lips the words of pardon and the promise of rest. "Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." One went on to the last, made more bitter and hardened by the cross he suffered, denying and mocking at Christ's power to save: "One of the malefactors . . . railed on Him, saying, if Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us." But the other's heart was touched at seeing that bitterness and anguish which he was feeling himself, appointed as the lot of one whose feet had only gone to seek out and comfort the needy, and whose hands had been only raised to heal and to bless. The dying robber thought of where his own feet had gone, and what his own hands had done; of the blood they had been swift to shed, of the pangs and ruin which they had caused, and yet the good and merciful Saviour was submitting, without repining or murmur, to what was a hard measure and fearful recompense, at the hands of men, even for such sins as his own. The grace of his Redeemer, who .

was suffering at his side, was with him. The bitterness and rage with which he had first met his punishment was calmed down before the sight of the meek and unresisting gentleness of Christ ; and the remembrance of his sin made the cross, dreadful as it was, seem lighter. He no longer tried to make light of it. He acknowledged all that he had deserved. He humbled himself under the mighty hand of God and accepted, as from Him, the heavy chastisement which was upon him. He answering, rebuked the railer, saying, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss."

We see in the robber who was crucified and died, as on this day, with Christ, the first-fruits and example of repentance, learnt while suffering in company with the great Sufferer. It was Christ suffering that led this sinner to repentance; it was the presence and sight of Christ's cross that made him feel humbly and meekly about his own. He caught the lesson quickly. He saw truly and rightly what sinners are meant to learn about their own troubles and sorrows, from beholding sorrow and shame heaped to the utmost on the head of their Master; and he spoke words which every Christian may speak as well, which are the natural utterance of every true penitent when the hand of God is heavy on him, and the sin, which he has perhaps long forgotten, is beginning to find him out.

This solemn day is a reminder to us all, not

merely of what our Redeemer has done for us, but also of the portion which He has appointed for us here. He did not suffer merely to pay the price of our redemption. He suffered that He might make us believe, without any doubt, that He was indeed in earnest when He spoke of His disciples taking up the cross and following Him. Surely Christ's cross is a seal and assurance, that as He was made perfect through suffering, so suffering, in some shape or other, is what those must pass through who hope to share His glory. We might have shrunk from that hard road ; we might have thought that He did not mean all that He said. But who can doubt now—now that we have seen our Master go first, now that even He had to suffer before He left this world and entered into His Kingdom?

And yet it is a very hard lesson. We acknowledge it as long as suffering is at a distance, and we look at it altogether in a general way. But when it is come, and it follows us about, and hangs upon us day by day, and hour after hour, when we feel its stings and its burdens and its drearinesses, one by one, then we forget God's hand and Christ's call on us to suffer with Him ; and we think only of each pain and trouble as if it had come on us by chance, or even as if it were unjustly and harshly sent on us. We think about our sickness, of its sharp pangs or its long weary hours, of its heaviness and restlessness which seem never to come to an end and never to get better ; and we think only how unfortunate we are and how much to be pitied by those whom

we see moving about strong and in health. We ask, Why should this have come on me and not on them? Why am I singled out to pine away in darkness and helplessness, and to be without what God allows to men in general? If our troubles are very great they take up all our thoughts. If they are small, we think them too trifling for God to have sent them on us; and so, in both cases, we put out of sight God's hand, we forget what Christ has said about the cross, and our being called to share in His sufferings; and so we think that we may repine and fret about them, that they have nothing to do with the good of our souls and our preparation for heaven, that we need not check ourselves in our feelings of vexation and bitterness, or in the haste or anger or peevishness which they tempt us to. Oh, how many mistake the call of God in the heavy afflictions, and still more—far, far more—in the smaller daily vexations and disappointments and heavinesses that weigh on our spirits and try our temper, and make us gloomy and unkind in our ways and words, and discontented in our secret hours when we are by ourselves, thinking over our lot in life and the changes that have come over us and the prospects before us. How many miss the instruction and the discipline to heart and tongue of such trials—too small, we think, for God to have ordered them for us. How many say to themselves, that in some one heavy tribulation they could see and humble themselves under God's hand; but they think they have liberty to complain and murmur against common troubles, as if their cross could not

be in them. It is indeed a mistake ; for in one way or another we must take up the cross ; and Christ means us to take it up, not in show, but in that which is painful and humbling to flesh and blood. We cannot make a mistake in seeing the cross in whatever in our life lies heavy and painful on us, in whatever we would wish away, if we could, or if it were lawful. And surely into all these trials Christ meant us to carry with us the remembrance of *His* cross. He meant us to recollect, for our comfort and for our self-abasement, that when His hour came, He, the divine and most holy Son of God, did not shrink from suffering. He meant us to remember, in our hours of faint-heartedness or bitterness of spirit, that it was necessary that even He should be made "perfect through sufferings." And surely He meant us to remember another thing. He meant us to remember, when we are smarting or sighing under our troubles, the contrast between His sufferings and ours ; what our sins have been, and how abundantly they have deserved all the punishment He may think right to send on them ; and how pure and spotless His life was, which yet was passed through and ended as if it had been the life of one who was cast out of God's sight and accused by Him.

"And we indeed justly ; for we receive the due reward of our deeds." If we would but think of this, how different would our troubles, great and small, appear. Christ came to show us how to suffer patiently. The penitent robber showed us how sinful men were to copy the lesson, and stir themselves

up to practise it. Christ has shown us how great and frightful a thing sin is by what He suffered to wash it out. He sends us suffering now to remind us of what we should else soon forget, the punishment which our own share in the sins of the whole world rightly and justly deserved. Wherever there is sorrow and vexation there is a call to see to ourselves whether we cannot trace their cause in the sins of our past lives. Often, indeed, it is but too plain. The sickness of old age has followed from the wickedness of youth. The sorrow which a parent has with a child is God's plain visitation, punishing him for the sorrow and disappointment which he made his parents feel when he was a child. But if we cannot see clearly how the affliction belongs as a punishment to any particular sin, we may remember, if we please, many sins which at the moment seemed to go without punishment. They seemed to pass without notice. They seemed to have been overlooked and forgotten. And now, what we suffer, though it may seem to come from another cause, is, it may well be, the punishment come at last of those long-endured sins. Our conscience is often a true interpreter of God's judgments, and points back, in a way which we cannot resist, on the bed of sickness or in the day of loss and humiliation, to sins which we did presumptuously in the pride and naughtiness of our youth; or to others which we kept secretly, each of us in the depth of his heart, and thought that no man should know them. Have we any right, with such knowledge of our past transgressions, to think it strange if God chastens us? Have we any right because He alone, and no man living, knows what we

have been guilty of, to expect that He should shut His eyes and let us pass on without reminding us of what has displeased Him in our past lives? Is not the true and right way, the only way of gaining comfort and peace in our troubles, to do as the penitent robber did?—not to harden ourselves in despair and bitterness of heart, and to turn against God with murmurings, and against our brethren with sullen peevishness, or coldness, or envy—not to pour forth the fierceness of our vexation in mocking and scorn, like the desperate man who railed on the Saviour who was dying for him ; but first to humble ourselves with the acknowledgment of the justice of what we suffer as the “ due reward ” of the evil deeds without number which have made God angry ; and then to look up to Him who suffered as we are suffering now, and take heart from the sight of His cross of grace and love. The suffering which He sends need not cut us off from His mercy and forgiveness ; nay, if we will take it, as sinners ought to take the punishment of their evil deeds, He will most surely cheer and console us with His strength and His care while we linger here, till He gather us to His own in Paradise.

This will be our stay in tribulation ; and when the last great tribulation comes we shall have accustomed ourselves to the only thought that can give us comfort under it. What would it be to die but for the thought that Christ has died before us ; has gone through that awful loosening of soul and body ; that His strength went away and His heart became faint, as ours is doing ; that His eye became gradually more dim, and His voice failed, as, step by step,

He sank in the deep waters of death? He went through it all; and we have Adam's taint upon us, we must go through the punishment pronounced on every one born of Adam, we must pay that debt of sin which must be paid before we can be set free from the power of sin. That is not to be escaped. But we may die with Christ. We may make ourselves familiar with death by contemplating that cross, and death, and grave, by which the sting of death was taken away for ever. And so, by God's grace, we may come in due time, thankfully and without terror, to accept death, both as the due reward of our own evil deeds, and as that which has been changed by Christ's death, from the mark and last penalty of God's wrath against sin, into the mark and last token of our fellowship and communion with His Son, and the opening of His everlasting and sinless kingdom.

XV

CHRIST RISEN OUR DELIVERANCE FROM FEAR

“And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye.”—
ST. MATT. xxviii. 5.

THIS was the first message from the heavenly world at the sepulchre of Christ. When the women came to the grave of the Lord, and found Him not, but only the vision of angels announcing the astounding tidings that He was risen, their first feeling was not joy but simply fear. And how could it be otherwise? For joy belongs to the life which we know and are familiar with; and to be told that their Lord was risen from the dead was something which overthrew and confounded everything which they and the world had been accustomed to. It was like bringing them without preparation into the other world, where all is different from the world that we know. Signs and wonders had been seen before—even the dead had been raised; but the sign of the prophet Jonas, the coming back by His own power of the Crucified from the grave, was something different from them all. That did indeed bring them close to that unseen One, who has all power in

heaven and earth. To see the laws of nature reversed, to be told that the long-known power of death was broken, that He whom they had laid in the grave, and taken leave of for ever, was once more alive from the dead—this was so overwhelming a change that it left no room for joy. They knew not where they were standing. They only knew that suddenly all that they were accustomed to was changed; that suddenly they found themselves in the midst of the powers of the world to come.

But when they had had time to think, when they came to themselves, and the shock had passed away, then they felt the force of the angel's words, "Fear not ye." To them that mighty victory of truth and righteousness was no cause for fear. It was indeed God's power coming close to men. It was indeed a proof that sin was to be overthrown. It was indeed the decisive test on which side was the victory. To have belonged to His company was indeed to have known One who had been dead and was now alive. It was indeed a startling and awful thing to have stood by an empty grave, from which the body which had lain in it had burst forth to a new life. It was indeed an awful thing to have belonged to One who could not be holden even by the bonds of death. But now that they had taken in the meaning of the wonderful event, now that terror and amazement had given way to certainty and belief and devout joy—"Fear not ye" was the true, the natural message of Easter morning to those who trusted in Him who had told them that He should rise again. "Fear not ye" was what was spoken to them, not by angels' voices only, but by

the very sight of the open tomb, by the evidences that indeed He was risen. Come what might—the world look as dark and threatening as ever—though sorrow, and pain, and martyrdom, might lie in the way for them between this time and heaven; yet henceforth, to those who had thrown in their lot with Him who was risen from the dead, the contest and struggle was as good as over: it was to be but for a little while, and then the end, as they had seen it in Him. Jesus Christ was risen indeed; it was not for them to fear for whom the victory had been won, and death itself had been conquered. For them life everlasting had sprung up from the very darkness, and from the prison-house of the dead.

This is the great Easter call to all Christian souls, amid the manifold discouragements and trials of this suffering and anxious life. With all its great and endless blessings its burden is heavy, its dangers are all round us, its chances terrible to contemplate, its end bitter and dark. Pain is grievous, and we are quick to feel it; life is toilsome, and we are weak; death is certain, and we tremble at its shadow. But that is what it looked like before Christ came from the dead. Now He is alive, He has risen indeed; and to them who believe this the look of everything is changed, the proportions of pain and suffering are altered. Come what may, Easter brings its glad word, Fear not. The world and human life still look outwardly what they looked before the great Easter day. It is still a scene of strange, disheartening, perplexing failure. Evil still prevails. Good seems often to be done in vain. The men of loud

tongue, and bold face, and thorough-going selfishness, have it all their own way, and carry things before them. "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart." "The ungodly flourish like the palm tree." We look forward with anxiety and dread to changes which seem to be coming on what we most value and hold sacred. Those whom we relied upon are taken from us, or they change and disappoint us; and the field is left open to the assaults of worldliness, of ungodliness, of sin. We seem to see the world becoming worse and more hopeless as we go on in life. True, our fathers probably thought so too; but still it is what we do feel, and it bears witness to the hollowness and imperfection of all human hopes, all human prospects. It is the terrible experience which sometimes has made men mad, or made them rebel against God and deny Him.

This was the look, the natural look of the world before Christ rose from the dead. But now He is risen. Now the bonds of death and ruin are broken. Now His resurrection is the pledge to us all, that behind the sufferings of this present time lies hid, ready to be revealed at the right moment, a glory which shall follow, equal to the greatness of our Lord's Easter triumph. Why should we despair for the world for which Christ has arisen from the dead? The Lord is risen indeed; fear not ye who have ventured your hopes on Him.

True, the days of suffering are not over for any of us. At any moment those awful indescribable pains which man has to bear without dying under them may be lying in wait for us, ready to spring forth. A little

nerve touched, a little channel of our blood stopped up, a little organ thrown out of its proper work, are enough to make days and nights an unceasing torture to us. Pain, that dark shadow which follows on all that man enjoys, has not taken its departure from the world ; it reigns among men as mighty as ever. In old days men used to ask wonderingly, why men should be made at all if only to suffer and then to die. But now we know. We know why we are called to suffer. We know who has suffered with us. We know that in the greatest triumph of our human nature first came the extremity of pain, and then the irresistible power of immortality, the unutterable glory of the heavenly throne. Suffering is not for nothing, since Christ has suffered. Pain is no longer without its reason and its meaning, since it was part of His cup and of His baptism, who went before us through the broken gate of death. It has its short reality ; but there is also the long, unending reality of its crown and fruit. At the end of it waits the conqueror's wreath, the martyr's palm, the servant's welcome, and the eternal Father's rest. We suffer for a while with patience, for Christ the sufferer is not only released from suffering, but has risen from death into visible immortal life. We may suffer from bodily pain, from agony of mind, from the cruelty of the merciless, from the treachery of the heartless, from the breaking down of hope, from the loss of friends. But now we can dare to come with the voice of comfort to the sufferers. Suffering is not the end ; there is continual peace beyond it. Fear not ye ; Jesus Christ is risen indeed.

Of all that shakes men's hearts there is nothing

really to be feared, since Easter has made the great and complete change in man's life. "Fear not ye" was the message sent through the women at the sepulchre to the world. There is but one thing that has cause to fear. Christ came to destroy evil; and whatever is evil has reason to fear His victory. His resurrection is the sure token that evil is judged, and is to perish. Whoever loves darkness rather than the light may fear to hear the certainty that He is risen. Whoever loves the will of the flesh rather than the will of God may fear to hear that Christ is risen. Whoever loves selfishness and pride, whoever trusts in this world's mammon and sells his soul for it, may fear to hear that He who gave His life for His brethren, and who humbled Himself to become poor that they might be rich, has shown His power and the certainty of His final victory by rising again. The victory of Easter is indeed the sign that none can doubt of what is to become of evil. Then it was doomed. Henceforth it cannot doubt what God thinks of it.

But fear not, ye for whom Christ died; ye for whom Christ is risen. The Easter message comes into the world lightening all the darkness, making plain the end of all trials, comforting against all dark prospects cheering all sufferers, strengthening all fainting hearts. There is nothing now to fear though the world be against us and sin seems to prosper, and good is thrown back, and in days of confusion and danger no help appears. There is nothing now to fear though God should appoint us days of bitterness and nights of anguish, and the dreary wakening every

morning to a lot without hope and rest. "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." This was said before the great Easter morning; who can doubt its meaning now? There is nothing now to fear, though one by one we have still to pass through the bitter hour, when, in darkness and alone, the soul has to leave all it knows and go forward into that unknown world where all our fathers are, and are waiting for us their children. There is nothing now to fear for those who, having walked with Christ during their life, pass from it by the path which He has trodden, and which ends in the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. "For now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

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XVI

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

“The Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.”
—PHILIPPIANS iii. 20, 21.

WE all of us acknowledge that one of the chief things that Christ has revealed to us is the resurrection of the dead. If we were asked, what is the great hope of hopes given us in the gospel, I suppose we should all answer that after death we should rise again in glory. It is the last and crowning article of our belief. “I believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” “I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.” That is why we are Christians. That is what the gospel holds out to us more clearly and more certainly than any other religion. It was to give us assurance of this that our Lord rose again. It was this great message which was the main subject of the preaching of the apostles—Jesus, and the resurrection. There are other things which people dispute about in the Bible and its doctrines; but no one disputes about this. It is the great mark of difference between our knowledge and belief and that

of all the world before Christ came, and where now He is not known. We are believers in a resurrection of the dead ; a new life of glory.

There is no question about it ; and yet it is one of those great things which—it would almost seem *because*—they are so great and so certain, have in reality the least interest for us in general. It is a matter of course. We think we know all about it. And we pass on to other things, which we know less about, and in which we expect to find something less familiar, less common-place. That, I think, is practically our feeling generally about this doctrine. Of course we could not bear to be without it. It would leave everything dark if it were taken away from our belief. Still, we do not think about it with anything like the interest with which we think about other parts of religion. We wonder indeed, sometimes, how men could ever have endured to live without it ; how it could have been possible for people to have any goodness, or any faith in God without it. But what is practically the living, actual, real belief which prevails in the majority of Christians, that they shall be indeed raised from death—to what does it really amount ? How much does this belief actually tell now on their ways and life ? Does it not seem that those who are respectable would be respectable still without it ; that those who are industrious would be industrious still without it ; that those who are kind would be kind still without it ; that those who are just would be just still without it ? Nay, I will go further—might not many of those who are religiously disposed, and take interest in religion, be all that they are now, have all that comfort

they now have without it? Is it really that which has much to do with making them religious, and just, and kind? How often, except perhaps at the very last, or in moments of extremity and agony, does it really come into their minds with the living force of something which they feel and understand and actually believe in? And for the rest of their lives are they not guided, moved, supported by another set of thoughts and reasons—very good and true ones it may be—which have not among them the belief felt in the soul, and stirring it to its depths, of that wonderful time and change after death of which St. Paul speaks in the text, and of which so much is said elsewhere in the New Testament?

Surely I can appeal to the experience of most of you when I say that the fact that we are, each one of us, to be raised again from death, fills but a small part of even our religious thoughts. We believe it, as we believe about the great ocean which we have nothing to do with, or about distant countries of the earth which we never expect to visit. We do not think of it as the one great event which all our lives point and move to, and in which they are at last to end. We do not think of it even as we think of death. We do, indeed, use the words, Life everlasting, Glory, Heaven, being with God. But we mean little more, generally, by the thoughts and ideas of them, than being on the right side of what happens after death instead of the wrong side. I don't mean to say that people may not be doing their duty, and living Christian lives, even with only this vague and dim thought of things to come. But surely we miss a great deal

of comfort and support and light, if the Bible sets before us grander and more lively prospects of what we are to be, and we are content to do without them.

What I mean is this. We have all of us, I hope, some time or other known what it is to look forward to the coming of something we greatly longed for ; some great enjoyment, the meeting with some old and dear friend, the change to some place where we had greatly wished to be, the coming of some event which was to give new happiness to our lives. Now, how do such things, when we are looking forward to them, fill our minds? Are they there, merely with a vague sense that *then* it will be better for us than it is *now*? Or do they not come with a charm and hope of their own, with a clear, vivid, distinct picture and imagination of the particular sort of enjoyment we are looking forward to? Before they come, do they not shed light and happiness on the days during which we are drawing near to them? Do not the thoughts which belong to them come unbidden into our minds, filling us with gladness, helping us meanwhile to bear what we don't like, giving us fresh strength for our work, while we think and reckon over to ourselves how we shall soon be recompensed? We must all know how such a distinct hope and looking forward brightens and lightens our life. It is quite different from the feeling that doing right will be sure to bring us good somehow at last ; different from the feeling which every one who does right has, that every single good and right thing that a man does, brings its own reward with it even at the moment ;

that it is better, at any rate, to have done it than not to have done it. This is one thing. And it is quite another to be looking forward hopefully to some particular thing, which we feel sure will bring us pleasure and happiness.

Or to take another illustration. When we are in health we don't think really much about health, though in words we should confess that it was a great blessing. But with what different feelings do we think about health and look forward to recovery when we have been sick. Then the one point to which our thoughts are turning all day long is of the delightful time when we shall once more be free and strong. It fills a place in our thoughts which nothing can drive it from. It is a strong, real, living thought. We think of things we shall do, of the steps by which we shall rise from sickness to health again, of the fresh air we shall taste once more, of the returning strength each day as our recovery goes on, of the change which will pass gradually over ourselves, and over the look of all things round us. It is a clear distinct expectation. It brings us comfort in suffering, it helps us to bear what is painful, it cheers us in long and lonely hours, it prevents our doing things which may delay or check recovery. It mingles with our most living thoughts. We may not talk much about it; but still we may for all that think much about it, live on the thought of it, find it the first thing in the morning to brighten our hearts, and fall asleep with it as our last comfort at night after a weary day.

Now, such a clear, distinct, particular hope, Christ sets before us in the resurrection of the dead. How

it is to be, and what it is to be in its circumstances, we know not; but it is no vague indistinct hope that is held out to us, but a promise of what, in its main significance, we can have not the slightest difficulty in understanding. We should know what was meant if we were told of some one of our friends who had just died, that in a week he should be raised again to life. We should understand what was meant if our physician at our bedside had the power to comfort us by saying, "You must die; but be not afraid, it is but for a little while, and then you shall be alive again, as you were before, with all your pains and sickness gone." And is anything short of that what is promised in the gospel? The dead are not to come back to us in this life. But they are to be alive again, as truly as if we saw each one of them come out of the grave like Lazarus. We must go to them before we can prove the reality of their resurrection, which is too great for this world; but the promise is of a rising again, as true as those few ones which God gave in ancient times as foretastes of that one which is to come for us all. You and I, and every one living or to live, are to have another life after we have died in this world. We are not to die at all in reality. That which is living in us is to live still, through the death of the body; and once more we are to be ourselves again, as really as the sick man who has been worn down by his sickness, whose strength has been wasted, who has gone through agony, and insensibility, and forgetfulness, is himself once more in strength and happiness in the day of his recovery. The resurrection of the dead is an individual promise. It is a hope to us

one by one. Not like those grand promises which are made to the Church at large ; in which we may, each of us, doubtless, have our share, but in which we seem to share only all together. The promise of the resurrection is to each single soul which feels and enjoys its own life, which looks forward with sadness to losing it, to which its own life is the most precious possession in the world. It tells each one of us that this precious life will not be lost ; that in due time, to each possessor of it here, it will be restored again, and for ever. We look on one another ; we look on each others' faces, on the faces which we have known so long, which we love and delight in ; and we know that each must die. We know that we who look at them, who are filled with love and pity and sadness while we look, must die either after them or before them. But as truly as each shall die, so truly shall each be made alive again. So has He said, Who is the resurrection and the life. So it must be if He is true.

Nor is this all. He has not only told us of a resurrection, but of a resurrection to a life as far beyond this in glory, as He Himself exceeds in the glory of His raised body all that is greatest and most beautiful on earth. It is not a mere coming back again to this life. This life has many charms and many delights ; and if sin were not here men might well be content with such blessings as God has given us here. But it is not to the blessings and happiness of this life that *that* resurrection is to be. As far as the glory of heaven is greater than that of earth—as far as it is more blessed

to be with God, and to know and feel His presence, than to have Him hidden from us behind a veil—so much greater is the blessedness and glory to which they, who shall be accounted worthy of that world, are to be raised. Listen to the way in which He, who alone knows how it shall be, has revealed to His apostle what is to come to pass. "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. . . . And as we have borne the image of the earthy, so shall we also bear the image of the heavenly. . . . Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

So in the passage which follows, St. Paul's one thought is that he may "know Christ, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. . . . For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

Think of these things being said—said in earnest—of you and me. Think of these things, and many

of just the same sort, being really written of what men's lives are to end in. Think of these weak and decaying bodies of ours being really meant to pass on to those inconceivable heights; that these bodies in which we stand now, these bodies in which we suffer and are brought so low, are really to be changed into the likeness of the glory of the Son of God. Yet this is what the Son of God has declared to be that for which He lived, and died, and rose again; even that this should be the end and upshot of our life on earth. Think that these things should be really said of us, and we not care for them. They would be the words and hopes of extravagance were they not so clear and certain. But as they are so certain, what a place ought they to fill in all our thoughts! Surely, when such things are told us, what stupidity, what miserable dulness, to let them fall into the background as worn out and lifeless commonplaces! If we had never heard them, what should we not be ready to give to the man who first told us of them, and made us certain of them? And now that we do know and are certain of what God has prepared for us after we die, shall we give them a formal and outward assent, and then think of everything sooner than of these magnificent hopes? Magnificent hopes, in which rich and poor are all one, in which the humble and the ignorant may raise his thoughts as high as the greatest and the wisest. Is it indeed nothing that we are to live again? Is it indeed nothing that these poor bodies, bowed and marred by sickness, which the drought has consumed by day and the frost by night, are, after the

last humiliation of death, to become fresh as the limbs of a little child, and bright according to the glory of Christ Himself? And shall we think nothing of it? Does it add nothing to the respect and honour with which we ought to think of the least and lowliest of those our brethren, who are called to such a glorious change? Is it no comfort to cling to in the miseries, the trials, the strokes of this life? Is death such an easy thing, so little terrible and dark, that we can do without the comfort of returning to life again when death is over? Are we so brave and so strong in dying, that we don't want the bright and special comfort which Christ has given us? Is life always so pleasant that we need not look beyond it? Have we everything so completely to our mind, that those lofty hopes to which the Bible tries to attract us are unnecessary to support us, to draw us on?

If we are to wake again to life, and if we *may* wake to such heights of glorious perfection as the wildest thought and ambition of man never could have dreamed of—if you and I, my brethren, really may rise after we are dead, to be like the divine and immortal Son of God—surely it is a thought to live for ever in our souls. We may not be meant for great things on earth, but we are certainly meant for great things in heaven. Life may go out in darkness and misery here; but God means it to spring up again so faultless and so blessed, that all remembrance of sin and darkness will have passed away. These things are certain. These things are given us to know, and think of, and rejoice in. Shall we not try, each one of us, to be saying

continually in our hearts, "I am to rise again"; "I am meant to be like Christ, as He was when He rose from the dead"? Shall we not try to make our belief in the resurrection as living a belief as our hopes are, when they look forward to some earthly blessing? Shall we not seek in the resurrection of the dead what God meant us to find in it—the greatest check upon sin, the greatest stay in trouble, the greatest comfort and protection against the dark reality of coming death, from which there is no escape; that which makes bereavement endurable, that by which we feel conquerors even in the dust of death?

XVII

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION THE TRIUMPH OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God.”—
ECCLES. viii. 12.

THERE are two moments in the history of the world, from its beginning to its end, in which the veil is drawn off from God's judgments, and it is seen without any darkness, or any mixture of doubt or uncertainty, that it is well with the righteous; that righteousness, whatever it may go through, is in the end to prevail and triumph utterly. One of these moments is past, the other is to come; and beside them there are none such to be expected while this state of the world continues. God indeed rewards and punishes; God is far from leaving Himself without witness in the daily life of men; God blesses and consoles in manifold and unspeakable ways those who trust Him; God shows whom He loves. He does not leave it doubtful whether it is better to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, or, at any cost, to keep innocency and take heed to the thing that is right. But the perfect, final, and manifest clearing up of His judgment on what men do, on the ways of the faith-

ful and the ways of the sinner, is not now. It is not now the time for it. While this world lasts, as I said, there are but two occasions when God makes known for good and all what is to be to those who fear Him. One of these occasions, still to come, is the great, last day, when all who have ever lived shall stand before God to receive judgment for the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad; when all that is unequal shall be made equal for ever, when all that could not be understood in God's dealings on earth shall be made plain in the light of eternity. That is one occasion. The other is past and over. It was not to the whole race of men, but to one man only. It was when He who had been condemned and put to death by men, as a sinner, for the cause of truth and goodness, was raised again by the glory of the Father on the third day.

Many men before and after Christ have suffered in the cause of righteousness, suffered indeed far less, for He bore on Himself the suffering and punishment of all mankind, He who was righteousness itself, without spot or taint of sin. But still others had suffered—suffered in the good cause, suffered for the name of God, suffered for being on the side of righteousness. They had died, meekly and bravely, and they had been buried. They were seen no more on earth; their righteousness seemed unacknowledged, unrewarded, by Him for whom they suffered. To have kept innocency and to have cleaved to the right, had seemed, as far as man could see, to bring them only evil—shame, and pain, and death. Whatever God might have done for them, or might mean to do

for them, here on earth men knew nothing about it. They had seemed to perish. God had not thought fit visibly to judge their cause, or to interfere to save or justify them. "In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction." It was faith only, faith that judged not by appearances, faith that rose above what is seen, to God who is unseen and unapproachable—it was only a strong faith which dared to trust against the melancholy resignation of experience, only that strong faith which could believe that they were "in peace," and that "though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality."

But in Christ the spectacle which had in others been only begun was shown also finished. The world had often seen, and was often to see again, the sight of righteousness suffering and cast down, to see its beginning but not how it was to end. But for once, in Christ, there was shown to the world both the beginning and the end. In Him was seen not only righteousness suffering, but righteousness triumphant. Never before had such righteousness suffered; never before had the inequality been so great between the righteousness and its earthly lot; never before had there been seen such perfect goodness, and never had it met with such shameful and cruel injustice. But, on the other hand, never had it been so completely cleared, so perfectly justified. Never before on earth had men seen, and never again will they see, till the great day of universal judgment, the final triumph of righteousness over the very worst that evil can do to it. When Christ—the

crucified, the dead—rose again from the dead, men had for once before their very eyes what righteousness was to end in, whatever it might seem to end in here. “Now is the judgment of this world,” said our Lord, when He was about to suffer. It was to be the great trial between good and evil, the solemn appeal to the justice of God, whether it were better for men, as God’s prophets had said, to follow righteousness at all costs, or whether it were better for them, as the world said, to do their own pleasure, and, if they so willed it, to follow sin. Now, in the judgment of the world, now in Christ, and in what God was to do in His behalf, was a verdict to be pronounced as awful, as conclusive, as overwhelming as that last judgment which shall wind up all things. The world had given its voice against the hope on which the righteous held fast to their righteousness. The world had often pointed out with scorn that they were nothing the better for serving God. The world had doubted whether indeed God did judge and rule the course of things on earth; the world asked, Where was the reward of the righteous when they had suffered for their righteousness and died? Where was the hand of the God of justice when righteousness had neither witness nor reward from Him on earth? That had been from the beginning the challenge of the unbelieving world. And now, in the person of Jesus Christ, the challenge was answered. In His person righteousness was to show itself unmixed and unclouded; from His mouth it was to speak words that never had man spoken; by His hands it was to do works of love and goodness such as the power of man had never done; righteousness was to

come in such bodily shape as might naturally attract all men to it, yet it was to be resisted, mocked at, condemned as the work of the devil; it was to be persecuted, and have none to defend it; it was to fail in its work, to be brought to shame and confusion before the eyes of men who had witnessed what it was, it was to perish and come to nought.

This is the meaning of those awful histories of the Passion which we have lately read and dwelt upon. They showed, in the highest instance, sinners prevailing over the righteous, and they showed in its fulness that triumph of evil so often described and prayed against in the Psalms. The wicked seemed to have their way; the words of the Apocryphal book of Wisdom were fulfilled to the letter—"Therefore," said the ungodly, "let us lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn, and he is clean contrary to our doings; he upbraideth us with our offending the law, and objecteth to our infamy the transgressings of our education. He professeth to have the knowledge of God; and he calleth himself the child of the Lord. He was made to reprove our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold: for his life is not like other men's, his ways are of another fashion. We are esteemed of him as counterfeits; he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness; he pronounceth the end of the just to be blessed, and maketh his boast that God is his Father. Let us see if his words be true, and let us prove what shall happen in the end of him. For if the just man be the son of God, He will help him, and deliver him from the hand of his enemies. Let us examine him with despitefulness and tor-

ture, that we may know his meekness, and prove his patience. Let us condemn him to a shameful death: for by his own saying shall he be respected. Such things they did imagine and were deceived: for their own wickedness hath blinded them. As for the mysteries of God, they knew them not: neither hoped they for the wages of righteousness, nor discerned a reward for blameless souls."

That was the boast of the wicked; and in other cases it has seemed, except to the eye of faith, but too true a boast. In Jesus Christ the boast was made in all its insolence, but only to be openly put to shame. In Jesus Christ the triumph of righteousness was not put off till the world to come. It was shown in this world. The very sun which saw Him die saw Him risen again. He was dead, but He was alive again. Death and evil had their victory over Him, but they could not hold Him. He rose, to show that it is righteousness which God loves, watches over, takes care of, rewards. God had delivered Him who trusted in Him. God had acknowledged as His Son, Him who had declared that righteousness was the will of God, and the sure and certain hope and reward of men. In Christ's rising again we have an actual instance of the triumph of righteousness, however it may seem to be trampled down on earth.

There are many things which Christ's resurrection is a proof of; and this is one, a proof palpable and certain, amid the perplexities and uncertainties of our troubled world, that, at last, it shall be well with the righteous; and, in spite of all his present prosperity and triumph, it shall

not be well with the sinner. Of this now God "hath given an assurance unto all men, in that He raised" the Crucified "from the dead."

I am not sure that we always understand how strong a faith it must have needed, before Christ rose from the dead, to believe this. Good men did believe it. The Psalms are full of this belief. But it was a brave and bold belief in a day when men had never had a proof of the power of righteousness *after death*; when they trusted like children to their general knowledge and assurance of the goodness of the Lord, even in spite of death. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," was Job's cry; and great indeed was the faith which, without knowing what was to be after death, yet felt sure that somehow or other it would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. But to us the proof which they had not has been given, that righteousness and its hope cannot be crushed and come to nought, even in the last extremity of ruin here. Christ is risen in spite of the desertion, and the agony, and the cross. Christ is risen, though the whole world was against Him. Christ is risen, though He was condemned as a deceiver and a blasphemer, and forsaken as one who could not save Himself, and whom God would not save. Christ was dead, and is alive again for evermore. And with Him, all the truth, all the goodness, all the righteousness, all the holiness, which the ignorance and sin of men have seemed to wrong, and confound, and destroy, are alive again; alive in the sure pledge which His resurrection has given of the judgment of God; alive in very truth, and only waiting His

return to be made clear and crowned by the righteous Judge of all.

Here, then, is one of the many great thoughts which Easter brings with it. It not only promises, it shows us, in an instance beyond dispute, the triumph of righteousness. Christ's victory over death is the very judgment of God between goodness and sin. It shows us which will certainly prevail, which is sure to be right at last. Now, indeed, we may be certain that "it will be well with those that fear God." And, I am sure, we often want the comfort of it still. With all our faith and hope the course of the world is still so entangled and confused, that we are often tempted to lose heart, and to think that it is of little profit to serve God; that the righteous and the sinner are alike left to find their way through life by themselves; and that, if anything, the advantage is on the side of the sinner. When we behold the victories of sin, when it seems as if we never could rise out of our temptations to the liberty of forgiveness and holiness, it sounds to us almost mockery to hear of God being on the side of righteousness, of those who try to do His will. Shall righteousness indeed, we say, ever prevail? Shall sin indeed ever be trampled under the foot of mortal man? It is for hours of doubt and darkness such as these that God has provided a consolation beyond the hopes and thoughts of man. Christ the righteous died as a condemned sinner, but He is alive again; and men have seen Him, and spoken with Him, and touched Him—a living proof that it shall be well with the righteous. "In that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God." With Him before

us, we may well bear up a little longer, hopefully and heartily struggling against the sins that beset us, trusting that by His grace we shall yet get the better of them. With Him before us, we shall be able to endure the sight of righteousness seeming to fail, and sin seeming to succeed; of goodness evil-spoken of and put to shame, of evil, wise, clever, insolent, and prospering to the end. We shall be able to see this, and yet not fail in our faith. With Him before us, dead and raised again, we shall be able to look forward to that dark cloud that rests upon our departure from this life—so awful because we cannot know what there is beyond it—and feel sure that He, who will meet us behind it, is the God of judgment and righteousness, the God who will never fail those who trust in Him; One who has given His only Son to die, that by His rising again He might be a pledge to His creatures of His mercies and His power beyond the grave.

The words of faith, which were written so as to be specially, and in the highest sense, true of Him, the first conqueror of death, were written also to be used and felt by us who hope to follow Him. "I have set God always before me: for He is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall. Wherefore my heart was glad, and my glory rejoiced: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For why? Thou shalt not leave my soul in hell; neither shalt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption. Thou shalt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is the fulness of joy; and at Thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore." Of Christ it is written, "In that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God," liveth

now and for ever. What were His thoughts during the first hours of that morning, when His work was accomplished, when the endless conquest had begun? And what will be our thoughts the first hour after our own resurrection, when we shall have left death and the grave behind us for ever? Go forward in spirit to the first moments of the certainty of eternal life begun. Think of that time when the endless blessedness will lie before us, without sin any more, without ignorance, without pain, without doubt—the unchangeable state, never more to be clouded, never more to decay. As He was, as He felt and thought on the first Easter morning, so may we be, so may we one day feel. Let our Easter time help us to imagine what those feelings will be—to have died once, once for all; to be alive from the dead for evermore. In that thought and hope let us strengthen ourselves; let us stir up all good purposes within us. Surely, if ever that blessedness is ours, if we awake up after His likeness, after all that has happened here, we shall be satisfied with it.

XVIII

THE GAIN OF CHRIST'S DEPARTURE

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth ; It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.”—ST. JOHN xvi. 7.

I DARE say we often wonder, as the apostles did, when we read these sayings of our Lord about the expediency of His going away. We don't doubt His words. But we think to ourselves, what is the meaning of them? Why was it so particularly good for the disciples that He should leave them? What benefit was it which His going would bring them, and which they would not have had by His staying? True, He went to send the Spirit, the other Comforter. True, He went to prepare a place for them. But why could He not have stayed with them, and the Holy Spirit have come too? Why could He not have stayed with them, and their places still have been prepared for them? Surely He did not actually need to go from one place to another, from earth to heaven, to send the Comforter, or to fulfil His good purposes to those who loved Him. And so, still the question comes back, why was it so expedient for the disciples that He should go away? Why were they to be the better, the happier, the more blest, by

losing Him who had been their example, and living guide, and divine Friend? Why should they be better off without His actual presence? And if His presence was, as it had been, so good for them, why should they not continue to have it? It almost seems like comforting them with mere words, as people sometimes cheer and comfort children to whom they cannot tell the whole truth, to assure the disciples that it is expedient that He should go. It almost seems to be—what the disciples themselves felt it at the time—a kind of vexing way of speaking, to say, in words that sounded like a contradiction, and of which the meaning was not understood, “Yet a little while, and ye shall not see Me; and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father.” We hardly wonder at the disciples asking one another what it could mean. “What is this that He saith, A little while. We cannot tell what He saith.” We ourselves do not always feel that we understand Him even yet.

The question is this, Why Jesus Christ should not have stayed among men after He was risen; why it was necessary and for their good that He should go away; why He should no longer be to them what He had been, when they heard His voice, and saw His great works, and were taught by Him, healed by Him, and had the sight of His perfect holiness before their eyes? Why, we ask, could not the risen Saviour be the Master and Guide of His enlightened and strengthened apostles, directing them what to do, sending them where it was necessary, ever at hand to answer their many questions, to rebuke, to encourage, to correct them,—to be still as He had been to them

before He was crucified? Why should not the Holy Ghost come, and Christ have stayed on earth too? Would both have been too much blessing and too much help in the troubles and difficulties which beset men's salvation? And yet, if it had been good for us that He had stayed, we may be sure that He, who had done, and suffered, and condescended to so much for us, would have done this also. It was not because the throne at the Father's right hand was empty, and that it would be giving too much honour, too much of His glorious presence to the earth that He went away. He did not put even His own glory in heaven above our salvation; He went because it was "expedient" for us. Why was it expedient?

The reason is, that Christ, unseen and in heaven, is and must be infinitely greater to the soul and heart of men than even He could be, seen by us with our bodily eyes on earth, living with us, and belonging to this earthly state of things which is for the present life—infinitely greater than even if He had been with us in the glorified body which He had after His resurrection, and in which He appeared and conversed with His disciples during the forty days before He ascended. It is because His kingdom is not of this world—it is because He came to open and draw up men's hearts to what is infinitely above this world, and anything that ever belonged to it—it is because He came to teach, and to give them "what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard," of the good things "which God hath prepared for them that love Him"—it was for this that, having shown Himself in the world, He did not stay in it. If He had stayed in it, our thoughts would have

been towards Him, as still belonging to this world. We see how difficult it was to wean the thoughts of His own disciples from hopes and expectations of earthly greatness. "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" was their question when He had risen. How much more difficult it would have been if He had still continued with them, in human form, even though glorified. How could that lifting up their minds to what was spiritual and eternal have been accomplished? How could they have been taught those great lessons of inner and spiritual religion, if the great Object of their faith was still visibly present with them, and as one of them? How could they have been made to feel as they did, that the kingdom of God was within them, that man has to deal and commune with his God in the secret reality and truth of his heart and spirit—how could they have been made to unlearn all that was outward and visible in their religious thoughts, and have had the eyes of their understanding opened to eternal truths, and to a religion that was all of heaven and in heaven—if they still could find, and see, and hear on earth the form and voice of the greatest of their teachers? With a Saviour and Redeemer still among them, still on earth, we can never imagine that entire giving up of earthly things, that entire taking hold of, and rising up to things unseen, to a heavenly hope, to a life with God, to which the Son of God came to call them. We could never imagine St. Paul's Epistles written. He would never have learnt to have his conversation in heaven, to have his life hid with Christ in God. He would never have called on us to seek those things which

are above, where Christ is at the right hand of God. St. Paul's life would have been wrapped up with a Saviour who was at his side, and he would never have thought of rising higher.

It was because His religion was to be a spiritual religion that Christ did not stay on earth. It was to be a religion of unseen thoughts, and hopes, and desires, of unseen intercourse between the invisible soul of man and the invisible God in heaven—a religion which leads our hearts beyond all visible things and all earthly excellence and greatness, to believe in, to understand that which flesh and blood can never see, that which to flesh and blood could never have been revealed. The Saviour was lost to the eye of flesh that He might be unveiled in greater clearness and truth to the eye of the soul. He was taken from our sight, because it is by our hearts that we must know Him as He meant us to know Him. “Yea,” says the apostle, speaking of that deeper and more intimate knowledge of Christ which had grown up among His disciples when He was no longer seen on earth, “Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more”; no more, that is, merely as He was known on earth. But in a far truer and more perfect way we know Him now as we could not have known Him on earth. For see what He was even after the resurrection, and what He is now. Think what different thoughts we should have had of Him if He had stayed among us, in ever so much grace and glory, yet visible to the eyes of men; and what the thoughts are we have of Him now—now that

we see Him not, but know Him to be seated at the right hand of the Father. And which is better for us—only to have known Him as our risen and glorified earthly Master, or to know Him in the glory which is of heaven, and which is His own, to know Him as our ever-present Advocate in the eternal world, the great High Priest, who ever liveth to make intercession for us? Which is better, to know Him as the companion, the light of whose countenance gladdens the outward eye of the body, or to know Him as the life of our souls—as the Divine Refresher and Consoler of hearts, which faint and lack help? It was necessary to know Christ as man, necessary to know Him as the partaker of our nature, one with us in all our trials and all our sorrows. It was necessary to know Him as man; but that was not enough. It was not enough to know Him as our brother, as a human teacher and example; it was not enough to know Him as the pattern of all that is perfect in human life, and as understanding and sharing every human thought. This is the way in which alone we should have known Him had He stayed with us on earth. We should have known Him as He is represented to have been to His apostles in the history of the Gospels; known Him in a most blessed manner indeed, as the most loving of Friends, the most wise of Masters, the most gracious of Advisers, the most complete and faultless of Examples. But still we should only have known Him as outward to us—not within us, one with our spirits, living in our life. It was not enough to know Him in the truth of His nature as man; we needed also to know Him as more than

man. Having learnt His tenderness, His sympathy, and His love for us, as man, and knowing that He never changes, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," we needed further to know how infinitely great was the Friend of sinners, who carried the love of men to the throne of heaven. We needed to know Him and to think of Him continually as our God. And we could not do this unless He were out of sight. For man cannot see God and live. Man can draw nigh to God only with his heart and spirit. So Christ has left us that we might know Him better. He has left us, not that we should cease to think of Him as the Son of man, but that we might also think of Him as the Son of God. He has left us because He could not be with us here visibly in the greatness of His divine glory; and it was expedient for us to know and trust in and adore the greatness of that divine glory. He has left us because in no other way could we have been brought to comprehend and believe how great He is. Had He continued with us He might have been to us, in more perfect excellence, what human friends are to us; but we never could have thought of Him as being also in heaven; we never could have thought of Christ dwelling in us and we in Christ, of our being one with Christ, and Christ with us. He might have said many a gracious word to encourage and direct us, but we could not have thought of Him as "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"—Christ in us the hope of glory. We might have rejoiced at the sight of His wonderful works, but we could not have thought of Him as the "Image of the

invisible God, the first-born of every creature . . . the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." We could not have thought of Him as that Son of the Father, "Whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the world"; that Saviour of human kind "Who, being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." We might have known that He had come from heaven, and belonged to heaven; but we could never have thought of Him as having entered into heaven itself, and appearing there as our Surety, our Sacrifice, our Mediator at the mercy-seat on high; nay, as having ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things. We never should have known the fulness of His sympathy, His tenderness, His love, if He had never left heaven to come down and dwell with men; we never should have realized His unspeakable and incommunicable greatness, if He had always stayed among us, as He was for a time with His disciples. His staying with us would have obscured that vision of His divine glory, that knowledge of His counsels, and the mystery of His love, which the soul can only see by faith here. His continuance among us would doubtless have filled our eyes with sights of wonder and beauty; but there is a wonder and a

beauty greater than the bodily eye can see, and *that* we should have lost. There is gladness in the voice of a friend, and glad indeed would the voice of *that* Friend have sounded; but there is a voice, unheard without, which whispers to the soul, sweeter than any voice which ear can hear, and in that He speaks. He took away His bodily presence, great as the comfort of it might have been, to impart the blessing of an unseen presence in power and secret grace and efficacy, to exalt and purify the soul beyond anything that our thoughts could imagine. He has denied us the touch of that hand of healing and of blessing, that we might raise our minds to those hands which bear up the worlds; that we might exult in the knowledge that they are spread over our heads, that they are laid in mercy on our hearts, to soften, to heal, to strengthen; that they offer our prayers on high, and are lifted up to pardon us.

This then is the reason why it was expedient that Christ should go away. He was taken away from the disciples' sight that He might be more perfectly manifested to their hearts. He went away in order, at once and for ever, to put all earthly thoughts out of their minds; to show them the pre-eminent value of the soul and spirit of man, that it was for the soul and spirit His religion was meant, and that by the soul and spirit man must embrace that everlasting life which He had revealed. He went away from earth, that men might learn to know what was their own in the unseen world above. He went away that, having known Him as Jesus of Nazareth the Son of Mary, they might henceforth also know

Him as the Eternal Son of the Father, King of kings, and Lord of lords, the Beginning and the Ending of all things; that having known Him as He is described to us in the Gospels, they might also know Him as He is celebrated and adored in the epistles of St. Paul and St. John. And lastly, He went away in the flesh, that He might come back again in the Spirit; He disappeared to the bodily eye, that in a more divine and heavenly manner He might converse with His disciples in the silence of the soul. He took away from them the light, the guidance, the comfort of His visible presence, that, Spirit with spirit, He might have fellowship with them, might make them, in their heart of hearts, know His sweetness and His peace; that He might give them by His enlightening and life-giving Spirit, a light, a guidance, and a comfort, which nothing outward, nothing of flesh and blood, not even His own blessed companionship, as He was on earth, could carry into those deep hidden springs of the soul, by which men live and have their being. Not otherwise could that mysterious visitation and communion be granted, in which the soul meets the God who made her, and draws from His presence grace, and truth, and immortality.

If then this is the reason why it was expedient that Christ should not stay in this world, but should go away to show us that nothing belonging to the body or things visible could compare in value with things belonging to the spirit, how, let us ask ourselves—how are we to have any share in these things? If Christ were on earth in bodily

form, we might have seen Him, have heard His words, have put ourselves under His guidance, have received His blessing. But Christ will not hold intercourse with us in the body: to our eyes He denies Himself; in this mortal flesh there is no approaching the glory where He dwells. How then are we to meet Him? How are we to have anything to do with Him? How is He, who is our Saviour and our Hope, to come back to us, to meet us, to do us good? It is only, it can only be, by our spirit rising to His Spirit; by our spirit, in truth and reality, meeting Him invisibly. You don't want me to tell you how we meet, in the spirit, the invisible God, the Saviour at the right hand of the Father. Eye cannot see Him, our voice gains no answer from the eternal depths. But we may meet Him, know Him, learn of Him—aye, who can dare to doubt it?—be aware of His nearness to us, and of His presence and communion with us. We meet Him on our knees, with eyes closed to the world, in the silence of earnest prayer. We meet Him in the hour when we gather ourselves up, and open our souls to things unseen, in humble meditation, seeking after His light. We meet Him when, not for form or curiosity, but desiring to know and realize Him, we read His Word. We meet Him in the time of sacred communion with our Redeemer out of sight, at His Holy Table. So, and so only, can we have fellowship with Him. So, and so only, can we hope that Christ will come back and meet us. To our souls He comes, and by our souls we meet Him. Nothing but what is of the spirit and real

mind of man is worthy of that high Presence, or can draw down that divine Visitor. Christ our Lord and God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Vainly we seek Him in our prayers, if prayer is but an outward and bodily exercise. It is but the utterance of the lips, it is but an effort and struggle of the mind, if our whole soul goes not up with our prayer, in the truth of its attention and the reality of its desires, to Him whom only the soul can approach unto. Vainly we seek Him in the pages of Holy Scripture, if we read with dead and dull hearts; and yet only in prayer, in sacraments, in His Holy Book, can we meet Him on this side of the grave. Oh, how anxious should we be that that heavenly Presence be not lost to us, by carelessness and want of earnestness and truth! How should we pray that we may not pray without thinking, when it is *He* we meet and speak to in our prayers. How should we pray that the Holy Scriptures may not be a sealed book to our unbelief and our hard worldliness—that we may not merely understand it with our minds, without feeling how it touches us, how it can comfort us. He only, who meets us in prayer, can also teach us how to pray. He only, who inspired prophets and apostles, can make their writings disclose to us the truth which they contain. O gracious Master, let our souls behold Thee, whom our eyes cannot see! Help us to pray, that in our prayers we may know Thee, and learn what it is to meet Thee. Speak to us inwardly by Thy Spirit when we read what is written in Thy Holy Word. “Without Thee its words

have a sound, but they do not give the Spirit. Sweetly do they speak ; but, if Thou art silent, they kindle no fire in the heart. They teach the letter, but it is Thou who openest the meaning. They tell of mysteries, but the key to unlock them is with Thee. They proclaim commandments, but it is Thou who givest help to fulfil them. They point out the way, but to walk in it Thou must strengthen us. All that they do is but outward ; Thou it is who dost teach and enlighten hearts. Theirs is but an outward watering : the increase Thou must give. They cry aloud in their words, but it is Thou must give the ear to hear and understand.”¹ O gracious Master, give us the hearing ear that we may hear Thee speaking to us in Thy Holy Word ; give us the seeing eye, that we may discover and recognize in its pages Thy eternal truth, O light of the world, true light of immortal souls. Thou who commandest the light to shine out of darkness, shine in our hearts—shine in the wonderful words of prophet, apostle, and evangelist, which are dark without Thy illumination, and give us the light of the knowledge of God in Thy face of love and majesty. O eternal High Priest of men, who offerest at the everlasting throne the worship, the longings, the sighs of human hearts, show us Thy goodness, show Thy mysterious and quickening power in our souls when we seek to know Thee in the stillness of our prayers. Meet us behind the veil, unseen, yet present ; and so fit us to see Thee unveiled hereafter. Fill our souls with the appre-

¹ *De Imit. Christ.*, iii. 2.

hension of that glory which is too great, too divine, for human eyes to look upon. So will we not wish to see Thee here. So will we thank Thee for having thought more of exalting our souls to the height of Thy heavenly truth, than of the comfort we might have had in the body by seeing Thy countenance and hearing Thy voice among us. Better to know Thee, as we do, out of sight, than to have had Thee with us, and to know Thee less. Better, far better, as it is, to know Thee now by faith awhile; and to wait till we are fit and able to know Thee, and to see Thee as Thou art. Lord Thou hast said the truth; it is expedient for us that Thou art gone away from us; that we have lost Thee to sight here for a little while, that Thou mayest better prepare our spirits to be where Thou art, with the Father of spirits, and where spirits have their resting-place for ever.

XIX

THE PLACE PREPARED FOR MAN

“I go to prepare a place for you.”—ST. JOHN xiv. 2.

WHEN our Lord had been with His disciples for three years, preaching the kingdom of God, and healing and comforting men, they thought it strange and unaccountable that He should be taken from them. To know Him, and then to lose Him; to see such grace, such goodness, such power, and to have to see it for so short a time; to have gone in and out with Him, and become familiar with Him, and to have become indeed persuaded that He had come from the Father to fulfil the promises of old, and then to be suddenly told that it was all at an end—that they must give Him up, that they must see Him betrayed, defeated, crucified, slain—this was too much for human hearts to bear. What was it to them that He spoke of going to His Father? How could they look beyond, or take any comfort in His promises, when all that they had thought promised and fulfilled was so rudely broken to pieces? “Now I go my way to Him that sent me,” were words of triumph, words of comfort, words of hope, for it meant going to God. But with this short joy of having been with

Him, and then this parting for good, this cruel, unexpected necessity of having to give Him up, just as they had got to know Him and love Him—what was the good of talking further of hopes, and blessings, and prospects? The one thought in their minds was that He was going to leave them, and that they should see Him no more; they had no room for any other. Their one thought was that He was to go; where He went when He was gone seemed nothing to them. Whoever might welcome Him, whomsoever He might bless, however great the change in what concerned the world, to them the one thing certain was that they lost Him. Of all men most privileged and blessed, of all men most miserable and disappointed; just to have seen the Son of God long enough to give up everything for Him, and then to be told that they must not think of keeping Him; that the few years that He had given them were all that they were to have.

And after the resurrection they were again to be disappointed. The Lord had been taken from them, and given back to them again. He had died, and He had risen from the dead. Once more He was among them, alive from death; with them still in the upper room, with them as they walked by the way, with them one by one, with them altogether; with them in the evening at the breaking of bread at Emmaus, with them in the dark early morning by the sea of Galilee, with them—no spirit, but in the body—showing in His hands, and feet, and side, the marks of the death which He had died; with them, doing wondrously as of old, speaking in the well-remembered voice the words which they knew none

but He could speak. He was back with them once more. Was this, then, what He had meant when He said, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know"? Was this presence, again restored to them after coming back from death, what He meant when He said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye shall see me: because I live, ye shall live also"? Was it this that He had spoken of when He talked of manifesting Himself to them after leaving them, and bade them not be troubled or afraid? Was it now fulfilled what He promised, "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. . . . I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you"? The joy had come—there was no question as to that; "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." But was the parting over, was He given back no more to be taken away, was the parting only those three bitter days of the cross and grave? Why should He be come back if not to stay; why should He have vanquished death on earth, if not on earth to make manifest His victory? What should make Him leave them, now that even death could not separate between Him and them; what need for Him to go away now that He had shown Himself mightier than all earthly powers, free from all the bands of nature, and nature's master, death? Now, at least, they might hope to lose Him no more. The parting had been gone through once, and He was given back; could they lose Him again? Or could it be

that once more they must find themselves mistaken, that they must learn that He was not to be with them in what was to be seen and done on this earth, and in the visible life of man? Could it be that the parting for good and all—till they had done with this world for ever—till all this world's work and changes, and its long chain of years, were over, was now to be? And they were to turn back by themselves to where henceforth they were to live and toil, to meet their trials in the world just as it was before they had known Him—with its pain and labour and weakness, its hopes, its bitternesses, its contradictions? Yes, even this it was to be. He was indeed back again with them, but not to stay. They had the blessing and comfort of seeing Him again, seeing Him alive from the dead; but they saw Him for others, not for themselves; they saw Him that they might be His certain witnesses, who could not be mistaken, and who were to declare to all mankind the "infallible proofs" of His resurrection. But He was not given back to them as they would have desired to have Him. He was not given back to them that they might always live with Him, and rejoice in His words and presence, in the sound of His voice, in His visible guidance and example, in the feeling of His hand and the sight of His eye. To lose all this means, with men, parting. And this was what they were to lose for ever here. The day was soon to be on them when they must see Him disappear, and hear the voice of the angels breaking their fond dream of having Him on earth in their company, and for their delight and comfort here.

"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."

The words which He had spoken before His Passion about the necessity of parting, referred not only to the parting before the cross, but to the final parting after He had seemed to be given back to them; the parting for good and all, when He was to go to the Father and they were to see Him no more. We have kept that great parting in remembrance which was the earthly end of the Lord's ministry. This was the last He had to do, visibly and in bodily presence, with the life which to us is the known and familiar one;—this little life of ours, which seems so important and so great that we find it hard to think of anything besides it, or to believe and imagine anything beyond it; anything which *was*, before it began to be, anything which *will be*, long after it has come to its end; anything which is going on, immeasurably more wonderful and great, around, above, beneath us, only all out of sight and hearing and knowledge. All about this little life of ours—this short space, before which comes the eternity which was from the beginning, after which comes the eternity which is for evermore—all about it is the infinite world of life and glory in which God Almighty dwells, and veils Himself, and worketh ever. This is all that we know of life—our spot of earth, a grain of dust compared with the boundless immensity of heaven; our threescore and ten years, a minute, and less than a minute, compared with that everlasting day which

has no beginning, and will see no end. Yet great and important do we think our life here; and so it is while we are in it. God placed us in it, to do our work in it, to fulfil His purposes, to grow up into fitness for what He made us to inherit. And Jesus Christ came into it, and lived in it as a man, to show us how precious and valuable this life is in the eyes of the Most High. He came into it to redeem it from sin and evil and worthlessness, to sanctify and bless it, to make a link and bond between it and the everlasting life above; to make us feel its worth and honour, for that He, the Son of the Father, the Maker of all things, deigned to share it with us.

This is indeed our life, our precious and inestimable gift of life; and beyond it, for the present, it is given us to know nothing more; it is not possible for us to find out and imagine anything greater. But, for all that, something else there is; something higher and greater, and beyond comparison and imagination more precious and valuable still. This is now indeed our present place, with its works, its duties, its opportunities, its growth, its joys, its hopes, its prospects, its blessings; its mercies which we may receive, its good services which we may do. This is now our place; but the place of man, the place prepared for man, the place where he is to be when he comes to perfection, and for which God made him, the place where at last, and where alone he may be, he will be, all that he *would* be here—his true place, to which he belongs, and for which he had a soul given him, and understanding

to know right from wrong, and a heart with which to rejoice, and love, and worship—that place is not here. That is the place of which Christ spoke when He said, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”

Therefore He went away, because that place which is ours was much more His. He went away that they might believe that *that* was His place and theirs. It was necessary to part, necessary to leave them behind; nothing else would have snapped the chain which held them to this visible life which they knew, and in which they had known their Master; nothing but losing Him, and knowing why they had lost Him, that He had gone to prepare their place, the place where at last they should be with Him, and where He was with the Father for ever. He went up on high: and then with tears and with great joy they understood the lesson that to give Him up was not to lose Him. Then they knew that to have Him out of sight was to have Him none the less. Then they knew that they parted with Him on earth to have One whom they had followed and conversed with, on the throne of heaven. Then they perceived that though their work and their sufferings might be for a while on earth, they themselves belonged to where their Master was gone; the place prepared for them was nothing less than the unutterable and never-changing glory into which He was withdrawn.

And that is the place prepared for us. That is the place pledged and assured to us now when,

after eighteen hundred years, we once more fix our thoughts by faith on that parting, that going away into heaven, which the disciples saw. What matters it in such a thing whether men see it or have to believe it? The reality is the only important thing, and that depends upon its truth, and not on our seeing it. It is to us by faith, it was to them by sight, but to both it has the same meaning, the same hope, the same lesson. The place which we were all made for, and for which all our earthly employments were given us to train us and make us fit; the place which will yet remain, and await us, when this life is worn out and over, which with all our changing remains unchanged; the place which was gained for us by the long train of wonders, from Christmas to Good Friday and Easter, that were done to make it our own;—that place is where Jesus Christ the Forerunner is gone before to prepare it for us. Henceforth the broken chain between this world and the world above is restored. For man is gone up on high, above the heaven of heavens. He who was once born of a woman, and slain on the cross, and buried in the grave, is not only alive on earth, but exalted to God's right hand in heaven. We know the place prepared for us since Christ has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. May it be indeed the place prepared for us. May it be indeed the place for which we are drawing near, the place where our hearts and treasure are really now, the place where we shall be as we leave our past behind us, when the darkness has passed over us, and we wake to be what we are to be for ever.

XX

FLESH AND SPIRIT

“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh : and these are contrary the one to the other : so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”—GAL. v. 17.

IN these words St. Paul describes the great struggle that has been going on in human nature ever since the fall of man, and that will continue in it till the end of this world ;—the flesh against the Spirit, the Spirit against the flesh ; the strange contradiction that goes on in our hearts, and sets us against ourselves ;—so that instead of having one wish and one will, and following that, we have two ; one which drags us one way, another which drags us another. What can be stranger than that, free as we feel ourselves to be to choose between what is set before us of two things which are contrary one to the other, our mind should struggle against itself in opposite directions. We have that within us which wishes to do right, to be good, to love and follow all that is excellent and praiseworthy ; we have that within us which longs after what we know to be bad, which tempts us by pleasures which we feel to be full of poison, which leads us to what is hateful, and vile, and

devil-like ; and yet we are not two but one. It is the same person who desires the good, and desires the bad which is against it. It is not anything *without* us which drags us hither and thither ; we feel that it is ourselves, our proper selves, our own single will, which is sometimes reaching after heaven, sometimes sinking to the depths of evil, sometimes fiercely striving with itself which it should do. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh : and these are contrary the one to the other." Hence the strange contradictions which we see and feel within us ; hence it is often not the things which we wish that we do, but just the very reverse of what we wish. The one will checks and thwarts the other, so that we cannot be wholly good, nor for the most part—blessed be God for it—wholly evil. There is a good thing in most of us which warns, rebukes, draws us back, even when we are set on giving ourselves up to evil. There is an evil thing in us which, even when we have made up our mind to do right, often trips us up, mixes with and spoils our good intentions, and keeps us from fulfilling and attaining to the good which we meant to do.

How is this great struggle to go—how is it to be ended ? This is what St. Paul is speaking of in the chapter from which the text is taken. To bring to light clearly that there was this struggle between good and evil in man's soul, and to help him to get the victory for the good over the bad, was what brought Christ our Saviour to take our nature upon Him, and what brought the Holy Spirit of God among men, to enlighten, purify, and strengthen them.

And St. Paul tells us that now that Christ has come there is good hope for us. He tells us that what is good in us may indeed get the better of what is bad ; and that the way which God has opened for us to do this, is by sending His Holy Spirit to work with our spirit, to help it to do what it could not do by its own strength.

There was another way in St. Paul's days, and the days before him, by which men tried to put an end to this painful struggle within them, between the good mind and the bad ; by which they tried to be, and hoped that they were, good, while they knew all the while that they were yielding to the evil. It was the way of what St. Paul calls, the Law. The Law, in its outward form and manner of speaking (for it really meant much more than it said), was a law of mere forbidding. "Thou shalt not kill ; thou shalt not commit adultery ; thou shalt not steal ; thou shalt not covet." And men thought that by keeping within these rules and forbiddings was the way to be good, the way to finish that troublesome conflict between their conscience and their evil desires and ways, and to be at peace in their souls with themselves. But that would not do. Man was too wonderfully made in spirit and nature for that dead, lifeless way of becoming perfect. Merely keeping within "Thou shalt not" will never make a good man ; merely keeping within "Thou shalt not," will never put an end to the strivings in man's heart between the better mind and the worse ; between the longing after what is pure, and excellent, and worthy, and the being pulled down to earth by our lower and baser

wishes and lusts. We feel of our own selves that a man may neither kill, nor steal, not commit adultery, nor bear false witness, and yet be far from what we should call a good man; far from being one whom we should love and honour and wish to be like, or think worthy of praise. The mere outward rule of "Thou shalt not be this or that"—even the mere outward law "Thou shalt do this or that," will never make the heart right. It leaves the heart and all its inward secret longings and thoughts untouched, and it is in the heart and soul, in our innermost feelings, and thoughts, and desires, that the great struggle goes on between good and evil. It is there that we feel so strangely how we are divided and torn asunder, between the wish to do right and the wish to do wrong; it is there that we feel so keenly the contrast between what we are and what we would be, if we could but attain to what is set before our minds as our pattern. The works of the flesh will not be driven out or put down by the outward law: the strength of sin will overbear even its terrors. Man must live and have his being, and succeed in his endeavours, not by something which merely checks and threatens and rebukes him, but by something which draws forth his affection, and inspires him with interest, and warms his love. As long as men only thought of the Law as merely forbidding and commanding, they felt, as St. Paul says, under a schoolmaster. They were afraid, but they could not rise to love. They might be rebellious, but there was nothing to touch them with contrite penitence. Their hearts were in bondage, and they could not

rise to the willing and ready obedience of free men. They felt as bondsmen set to a task, and looking for wages; they could not have the feelings of loving children, sure of finding in their Father's love more than they could ever conceive of.

The way of the Law would not do, for the Law was weaker than the flesh. Its mere forbiddings and commands were no match for the living strength of our evil mind and nature. The sin within us, the mad lusting after pleasant things, the force of hatred, the obstinate selfishness, the rooted spite and grudges, which tempted men to evil, could not be kept in order by mere laws, even by the most holy and venerable ones—not by a mere law, even from God Himself. “The works of the flesh are manifest, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, revellings, drunkenness, and such like.” And though men knew quite well—as well as St. Paul could tell them—that they who did such things could not inherit the kingdom of God, the mere saying, even by God, that they must not be done, was not enough to overcome the overwhelming and terrible power of human passions; the knowledge alone that they were evil and doomed to punishment, was not enough to help men against the pressure of the temptations which drew them down to these evil deeds. Under the Law, and with nothing but the Law to support them, the flesh lusted against the Spirit and gained the victory over it. And the Law, which condemned them when they had done evil, only added to their misery.

If they would be conquerors over the flesh and their worse selves they must rise higher. They must aim at something more than merely keeping within the letter of the Law. Sin was strong within them; they must seek for something else within them as strong. It was not enough to try and keep from evil; they must seek for something which should be as active and living and powerful for good, as their lusts and temptations were living and powerful for evil. We feel and know it of our own selves. A good man is not merely one who keeps from outward sin and mischief, but one who is strong and full of desires, and wishes, and actions, that are all for good. He is not the man who merely abstains from the wilfulness of the profligate, or from the evil words of the malicious. He is one who has a mind and will of his own, and who can speak his mind strongly, and is a match for those who cross him; only that his mind and his words, however strong, are strong in the cause of goodness. He is one whom we admire as loving, and generous, and pure, and true, and above all mean and wicked things. A man whose hunger and thirst is for goodness and righteousness, as much as the hunger and thirst of the sinner is for sin.

"The fruit of the Spirit," says St. Paul, "is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." These are much more than the absence of sins: of murder, hatred, variance, uncleanness, envyings, drunkenness. Where there is love, and gentleness, and goodness, the soul is raised above even the temptation to those

evil things which assault those who are still allowing their evil minds to rule over them. The very fountain of the heart is cleansed, so that it may of its own self send forth good things, because it loves good and is turned away from evil. "Against such," as St. Paul says, "there is no law." There is no law because no law is wanted. No law is wanted to make him whose soul is full of love to his neighbour keep from doing ill to his neighbour. No law is wanted to make him who is full of meekness, gentleness, goodness, and long-suffering, keep from hurting his brother by word or deed. No law is wanted to make him who follows the Spirit's leading, or who is longing for the blessing of the pure in heart, keep from adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness—which are the works of the flesh. No law is wanted to make the generous and noble-minded abstain from breaking the eighth commandment, or from taking or wishing for what is another's. They do not want the Law, for of their own selves they fulfil the Law. For all the Law is fulfilled in one word, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

This then is the way which St. Paul points out to those who wish to end that weary struggling and division within themselves. Do not merely think of keeping from evil; but try with all your heart and desire to have formed within you those fruits of the Spirit which, of their own very nature, keep men above doing evil, keep them away from it, and give them other wishes and other thoughts. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." Look to those graces which

the Spirit has shown to men in the world. Listen to those inward whisperings which are from the Spirit of God, and which make you admire and love all that is good, and pure, and true, and loving, and useful to men; all that is gentle, and patient, and noble in human character and conduct. The good within you—your better self—leaps up to meet it, longs to be like it, and feels how completely, if it were like it, it would be raised above the dreary and often miserable strivings between good and evil; between the wish to sin and the fear of sinning: between the love of pleasure and indulgence, and the sense of unworthiness and shame which keep us back in our path. These things, so admirable and beautiful, which make our hearts beat and our eyes fill with tears when we hear of them in others, are indeed from heaven. The Holy Spirit of God brought them down with Him. They came down to earth in all their perfection in the person of Jesus Christ. In Him were all the fruits of the Spirit seen in all their ripeness and excellence. But He came that we might share them. He sent His Spirit to make them known; not in the outward letter of exhortation and description, but in the inward heart of man. Who does not understand their excellence? Who, in these gospel days, does not discern their heavenly beauty? They are for us. We were made Christians that we might have them. We were made Christians that, with such thoughts and examples before us, we might be enabled to finish the strife between sin and goodness, and be filled and animated with that new Spirit from on high, which should of its own

strength and nature cast out the longings after evil things which clog our endeavours after better things. The Spirit lusteth against the flesh ; and the Spirit came to show us a new light of goodness, and to help us to reach it, in order that the Spirit might overpower the flesh, and rule it without resistance. "If we live in the Spirit," says St. Paul, "let us also walk in the Spirit." That is, if it is by the Spirit that we are made Christians ; if it is by the Spirit that we have been raised far above the condition of all former generations, under the old Law and prophets ; if it is the gift of the Spirit which has made all things new to us, all knowledge, and hopes, and the strength to serve and please God ; if it is the Spirit which is really the sustainer of our soul's life, the source of it here, and the assurance of its continuance for the time to come ; if it is by the Spirit that we live, by that same Holy Spirit let us take care to direct our steps, and choose our path. He shows us truth : but we must try to see it, to grasp it, to bring it home to our hearts ; to make it our standard of thought and wish and deed. Those heavenly fruits of the Spirit, they are not to be reached by lazy wishing. We follow Him who suffered every extremity of pain that He might be faithful to that Spirit of love and truth and goodness which ruled within Him. And so must we be faithful. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." The Spirit can subdue the flesh, but it cannot allow it to rule along with itself. Even if the flesh must be crucified in order to be conquered, the price must be paid by the disciple which the Master did not refuse to

pay. We must make our choice. Once let goodness and purity and the mind of Christ be established within us, and we may defy the flesh and its evil works. But we cannot at the same time be seeking for the fruits of the Spirit, goodness and purity, and the mind of Christ, and also be allowing ourselves to be hankering after the flesh and its affections and lusts. We must crucify the flesh. If we will not, then we crucify afresh the Son of God.

May God help us in the struggle which, with many Christians, is still going on between their better self and their worse self, between the Spirit and the flesh within them. May He make us convinced that the only safe and happy way out of it is resolutely to put ourselves under the guidance of the Spirit ; resolutely to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, which would draw us away. May He open our eyes more to the beauty and admirableness of our Master, who is our example of all that is good and excellent in man. May we so share His love of all that is good and excellent, that we may learn to feel towards sin and evil as He does ; and in due time to be delivered from the love of it, and to be raised safe above the temptation to desire anything but what is worthy of a child of God ; worthy of one who has the Spirit of God to guide him here, and to raise him after death to the presence of his ever-blessed and loving Father.

XXI

THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THE WORLD

“And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”—ST. MARK xvi. 15.

THIS, as St. Mark tells it, was the Lord's last charge to His apostles before He went away into heaven. And in St. Matthew's Gospel His last words are to the same effect. “Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

This then was our Master's last charge and command. His disciples were not to keep to themselves the blessings of grace and truth which He had given them. They were to go forth into all the world, among all the nations; and to spread over all the earth the faith, the hope, the love which Christ had taught them. They were never to cease from teaching—till all had learned it—that

great mystery of godliness in which God's revelations to man, through so many ages ended, that the true God of all worship, of all power, of all salvation, is, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—three Persons, all taking part in the redemption of the world—three Persons, and one God. And lastly, in this work of spreading the gospel through the world, the apostles and missionaries of truth were to have the perpetual certainty of the Almighty Master's presence. They were to go forth remembering His last words. "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." They were to go forth remembering, whatever might be their success, whatever fate they might have to meet, that He was with them every day—every day of triumph, every day of disaster and trouble; "Lo, I am with you alway," all the days, during all the lengthening and lingering centuries, "even unto the end of the world."

With that He left us. They are the last words recorded of all His communications to His apostles. Just think with yourselves, what would be the effect on those who heard it, of such a parting charge. It made all the difference to the apostles, whether they should simply be holders and possessors of truth and blessings, teachers and ministers in their own place and people, of the grace in which they believed, or whether they should be missionaries of it—messengers running to and fro, and never pausing, never resting in their ceaseless and unwearied wanderings, to carry the news onward and onward, further and further on, to ever new hearers and more and more unknown lands. And so St. Paul

understood it : "From Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum"—the type of all that was barbarous and uncouth—"I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation : but, as it is written, To whom He was not spoken of, they shall see : and they that have not heard shall understand." "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians ; both to the wise, and to the unwise."

Those parting words of Christ put the stamp on Christianity that it was to be a universal religion ; a religion, not merely universal in the sense that it should be freely open to all who came to seek for it, but universal in the sense that it should go out and seek for men in their own homes ; a religion of conquest and progress in all directions ; a religion which by a holy warfare and violence should attack all other ways of serving God and living our mortal life, and be satisfied with nothing short of having won over the whole creation, the tribes of men of every language and colour, from north to south, on whom the sun rises and on whom he sets, to the obedience of Christ, to the kingdom of His Father.

That was the new thing which was done in the earth, which these wonderful words of Christ began. There was at that time a true religion in the world. It was the religion which had come down from Abraham and Moses. It was the religion whose chief seat was the city of the Great King of Jerusalem, whose law and truth was written in the book of the

Old Testament; whose one single altar was raised on the holy hill at Zion; in whose one temple, from age to age, the presence of God was believed to dwell. In this mountain, it proclaimed to all who listened, men ought to come and worship God; and they did come. They came from the ends of the earth; men of the dispersed tribes of Israel, scattered over the face of the world, found their way back there, as they do still, with many a weary journey, through perils of months of pilgrimage, to behold the place where God's glory was—to behold, to worship, to offer sacrifice, and to be comforted. Heathen conquerors came in the pride and flush of their success, to pay their homage to the unknown but awful Lord of Hosts, who dwelt in mystery between the Cherubim, in that silent and empty sanctuary, where no image or form was beheld. There came Gentiles, touched with the holiness of the Jewish law, won by the purity of the faith, which went up, above all the gods and idols of the heathen, to the one Lord and Ruler of heaven and earth. There came all who had heard of and worshipped God, to that one spot in all the earth, where God had hitherto set His Name and made Himself known. They came to Jerusalem to keep their great feasts, and to rejoice in the remembrance of His great deliverances and of His promises, at the Passover, at Pentecost, at the day of Tabernacles—"devout men, out of every nation under heaven"; and speaking all the languages of the earth, "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and

Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians." They came in crowds, humble and nameless servants of the great Master, who in every nation accepts those who fear Him, and work righteousness. They came singly, men of consequence who had courage to stand alone, where, in kings' courts none thought and felt as they did—like the man of Ethiopia, "an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, and returning, and sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet." They believed not only that there was only one true religion, but that there was only one place in all the earth where that religion could be practised in its perfect way, where the fulness of its promises and grace could be hoped for, where the God who gave it, would be pleased to meet and bless His worshippers.

There was a true religion in the world, but it was then confined to a single spot, and was the property of a single nation. And all the false religions on the earth were like it in this, that they were all in the same way confined to places and people. They were satisfied to tell all their neighbours that in *this* mountain or in *that*, in this idol shrine or in that, was the right place to worship. Those who had gone forth to conquer and bring nations and kingdoms to obedience, were not missionaries but warriors with armed hosts. Hitherto the world had never seen a religion seeking to extend its boundaries and to spread the truth

to those who had it not. It had seen stay-at-home religions ; and it had seen, wandering over the earth, conquering and destroying, breaking up old landmarks, overthrowing the customs of ages, and wreaking vengeance on the idols of conquered nations, the ministers of earthly wars, with the bow and the spear, the shield, the sword, and the battle. What had never yet been seen since the world began, was the sight of men, bursting forth from their own homes and lands, as the conquering kings of old had poured forth over the earth, full of a great desire to subdue, to overthrow, to bring into captivity, to win great and lasting victories ; only to do so in the name and cause of a religion, with its hopes in heaven ; to subdue numbers, but to the faith and love of a Lord out of sight ; to overthrow, but to overthrow falsehood, and error, and wickedness. These men desired to bring into captivity every imagination, every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and win every thought to the obedience of Christ. They desired to gain great victories ; but only by giving up every earthly hope and blessing, and their own lives at last, that they might win souls for Him who died for the world ; that they might lay, deep and strong, in nations as far apart as the ends of the earth, the foundations of the one everlasting Church of God.

This, I say, was the new thing in the world, to which the last charge and command of Christ gave birth and sanction. They called into existence, and consecrated to the end of time, the missionary of religion. He had never been known before in

false religions or true. Now He was to be the mark and inseparable sign of that universal, never-dying Faith, which was in time to embrace the earth, which was to outlast its greatest kingdoms, which was to go on for ever beating back darkness; and against which, for ever warring, the gates of hell should not prevail. This was the new feature of the gospel—that it was to be a Church, a religion, a faith, a hope, a law for all the world; it was to go out and look for men, and gather them, and convert them; and not wait for them to hear of its truth and grace, and come and look for it. The days of a chosen people and of a holy law, of a single temple and altar, were passed away. It was not enough to stay at home, and rest in God's truth and revelation in Judaea. What was now brought into the world, what the Redeemer had bought with His own blood, what He was going up into heaven to shed abroad upon the world, was something *for all mankind*; something which all mankind were to hear of; something which was to show God to be the Father, not of one small family and Church, but of all the tribes, of all the souls of men.

We are not Christians, but mere Jews in spirit, if we let this great essential point in our religion slip out of our minds. Our knowledge, our grace, is not for ourselves alone, but for the world, as far as we can communicate it. The words—the last words—of our ascending Master are for each generation of those who know Him, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,” to the whole creation of man. The

Church of Christ is a universal Church, and therefore a missionary Church ; as ambitious, as greedy of conquest, as impatient and unsatisfied with what it has yet gained of the earth's face, as any of those mighty conquerors who sought to gather on their own heads the crowns of the world. The Church ceases to know her Master's spirit, and no longer understands His voice, if she ceases to care about spreading His kingdom. The proof that we have not lost the old faith of the Church of Christ, that we are still treading in those ways of our fathers, which apostles and saints, who had learned from Christ, had traced out for them and us to walk in—the proof that we are still inheritors of that glorious gift of truth which the Son of God made over to mankind—the best proof of this is, that we are desirous to share that faith and truth as widely as we can ; that we are desirous to carry forward the broad plain line which divides truth from falsehood, light from darkness, goodness from evil ; that we are desirous to multiply the numbers of those who are restored to what God meant all men to be, to drive forward the work for which Christ died, to plant the seed of Churches to be. Then, that which is the hope, the right, the heritage of all men, shall, in ever-increasing measure, be made known to all men. Then shall we win something from the realm of darkness ; and in the spirit of the first and greatest of missionaries, St. Paul, we shall in our own day and generation help in some degree towards what is written : “To whom He was not spoken of they shall see ; and they that have not heard shall understand.”

When this spirit departs from Christians, Christi-

anity will be dead, and will have confessed itself hopeless and faithless. Yet the work is slow, and long, and weary. It is a work which, where the Church is settled and has become part of the regular order of a whole nation, is to be done, not by all, but by special and chosen instruments. It does not come home, perhaps, as the duty of you and me to go forth as missionaries. Yet woe is unto us if we forget that we are concerned in it. Woe is unto us if we omit to do what *is* our part. We are in great danger of forgetting it. We are in great danger of despairing of it, and thinking it a vain and fruitless effort. We sometimes think how utterly hopeless it seems to think of converting the heathen; and it is a convenient thought, for it eases our conscience, and closes our hearts and our purses. When such unbelieving thoughts come into your mind, put before it such a reflection as this. Think what we know ourselves of Christ and His truth; think what this country possesses of light and grace; think what the gospel has done for us in England, how its faith and comforts are wrapped about the deepest foundations of our hopes. And then think what this country and our fathers must have looked like, ages ago, to the eye and mind of the first missionary who thought about and cared for England and its conversion. Is there really anything more hopeless to the missionary who now lands in India, and surveys the field of heathenism before him, than there was to the eye of those messengers of truth, who came here when the land was filled with heathens, and who did not despair of them? And shall we, with

our knowledge, our power, our boundless means of doing what we resolve to do—shall we English, with all the history of a converted and changed world behind us—shall we give up, and faint at the dark gloom which faces us, and which it is now our part to assault, as it was once the duty of distant Christians long years ago to attack heathenism in England, and to bring us light? They did their part. We are enjoying the fruit of their high-hearted faith, their unsparing self-sacrifice; and shall we be so cowardly, so selfish, with all our increased means of helping on the work, as to shrink from our small share of duty? They, in their simplicity, obeyed their Lord's words, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"; they gave their lives to it, and went. The work is still not half done. The sins, the lukewarmness, the divisions of Christians, have thrown it back, perhaps for centuries. But the call still sounds, with as much force, with as much pressing necessity as ever: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." How shall we then, we who stand on earth now, the representatives in our day of the universal Church of God, dare to be deaf to the last charge of Him who founded it?

XXII

WITNESSES OF GOODNESS

“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles : that, whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”—1 ST. PETER ii. 12.

IN the days when St. Peter wrote these words, and long afterwards, the disciples of Jesus Christ, as a body, tried very earnestly “to eschew those things that were contrary to their profession, and to follow all such things as were agreeable to the same.” They were very sincere in their belief and profession, and they endeavoured to live a life consistent with it. It is always difficult to compare the goodness and earnestness of one age or one set of people with another ; and we know from the New Testament that there were, even in the earliest days, great evils and great shortcomings. But we cannot doubt that the Christians of those days were the men who, above all others in their day, followed after goodness, holiness, purity, unselfishness, kindness, charity, truth. They were the good men of their time, and the time was a very evil one. They were the light of the world, in a world which was very dark. They were the salt of the earth, in the

midst of corruption, seemingly without remedy or hope. In the midst of a crooked and perverse generation they shone as lights in a naughty world. That we cannot doubt. I do not say that there were no good men among the heathen, who were not of them; for we know that there were those who feared God and worked righteousness, and were accepted of Him, in every nation. But as a body of men, the Christian disciples, those who heard the lessons of Jesus Christ or had learned His truth from His apostles, were the examples and witnesses to the world of their day, of goodness—real, true goodness, goodness of the heart, and spirit, and life. But now, the thing to observe at that time is this. Here were the best men of the world, men who came not only preaching God's righteousness, but showing it themselves; just, true, merciful, self-devoted, full of love, following the example of their great Master. Yet they were, of all men of their time, the most condemned and detested. "As concerning this sect," people said who knew nothing more of it than its name, "we know that everywhere it is spoken against." For being good, and the witnesses and proofs of the reality of righteousness, they had to bear the character of being the worst of all men. There was nothing that was not too hard or too scornful to say of Christians. They had need indeed of the consolation of that blessing which the Lord so early held up before them to prepare them for what was to be their lot. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake." They were sharing in their Master's

humiliation. "The disciple," He said, "is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. . . . If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" And the announcement was fulfilled in ample measure. Then, and long afterwards, they who represented in the world the truth and goodness of God, and lived not unworthily of their calling; they who were the pledge in a world which had become utterly corrupt, that it should be reformed and improved, and brought back again to better things and purer principles; they who most showed in their deeds those great laws of God which were written in the hearts and consciences of all men; these men, the first-fruits of mankind to God their Maker, were set down by the world at large as wicked haters of their brethren and fellow-creatures, ready for any mischief, capable of every crime. There was no story of them too monstrous to be believed. There was no charge too inconsistent or unlikely which people were ashamed to cast in their teeth. We see, on the one hand, the best, the purest, the most loving, the most sincere men of their day; we see, on the other hand, that these very men were, among all the bad men and bad sets of men of their time, worst spoken of and counted as the most worthless and hateful. Then was seen the surprising sight of men to whom the world owes so much of all its improvements and all its hopes, of men, who among all who have done the world good may be said to have been those of whom the world was least worthy—reckoned among the vilest enemies of the world and mankind. Of

all men they were those who took most trouble to do right, and suffered most for being really so much better than others; yet they were everywhere spoken against as evil-doers.

But in spite of all this, you see how calmly, and quietly, and hopefully, their great teachers speak. They know it, and feel it. Yet they are not cast down, they are not alarmed; they do not lose heart. Only go on doing right, they say, you will prevail over the evil tongues at last. Only go on doing right; you are set to show and enforce goodness and righteousness, and the world will understand you at last, in spite of all the talk now. Keep yourselves pure, "laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings. . . . Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." In those terrible times of trial, when men are searched out to the bottom—what they really are, and what is the spirit which rules in them and makes them act—go quietly on, doing all your duties to God and to man. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. . . . For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. . . . Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." Live quietly and honestly among your neighbours; returning good for evil, so

that they may be ashamed in the end, who assail with insults and slander your good life in Christ. That was St. Peter's advice to his companions, who lived amidst cruel ill-nature and scorn, trying to do right; who reaped as the reward of trying to do right the reputation of being deeper sunk in what was bad, and base, and contemptible, than any one else; who, for the sake of true and genuine goodness, had to forfeit their character as men of common sense and good feeling. This was what was seen in the first days, and this was an apostle's way of looking at it.

And he was right. Those evil tongues, which were in all the world, and which spoke so loudly, so bitterly, so carelessly, have long been still. That righteousness, which they denied and slandered, is made clear as the day. That goodness, which they so lightly spoke evil of, as if it were sin and folly, has drawn the whole world to admire and own it. Evil speaking, contempt, mockery, from everybody round, from high and low, could not put it down; for it was no outside or partial show, but real, and deep, and true. In due time it made its way, and people could no longer stand against it. Those pure and holy lives told in the long run against prejudice and unpopularity and hatred. And if the religion of Jesus Christ has since those days spread like leaven through the world, and lasted in spite of the changes and chances of so many hundred years, one great reason of it is, we may be sure, that those who first taught and professed it tried so much in earnest to do right, and to live as they taught

and professed, in all goodness and love and truth.

We inherit their labours. Their goodness was set at nought and made a jest of, that for us it might be the freest and easiest of all things to follow their example, and yet not have to suffer their trials. That standard of holiness and righteousness, because of which they had to endure the reproach of being hypocrites and deceivers for trying to introduce it into a corrupt world, is now the common standard of us all, recognized and outwardly honoured, even where it is not acted upon. We are so accustomed to that victory which they gained for truth and goodness, that we can hardly understand it, when we read in their writings how they were reviled as evil-doers for what we honour the most; how they were despised and abused as "the offscouring of all things," for being examples to the world of all that we count most excellent, most beautiful, most noble. So great has been the change. And how did the change come but by their living through good report and through evil report, in all sincerity and earnestness, according to the high and great lessons which they taught. They lived through the evil report; and now we can follow them, and find it may be done through good report.

The dangers, the burdens, the bitter prejudices, the scornful reproach of those first days, are gone; but the duty of those days, though so immeasurably easier, remains still. God has showed us light to the intent that all may return into that way of righteousness from which mankind wandered of

old, and are ever in danger of wandering. And light is shown us, that we may not only look at it but follow it; that we may avoid and forsake all those things which are contrary to our profession, and may follow all such things as are agreeable to and consistent with the same. To us too the apostle speaks. The Gentiles, among whom he lived, have passed away, and have made room for the nations who name the Name of Christ. People are no longer spoken of as evil-doers for owning Christ as their Master. Still, we too have to keep our life and conversation honest among those among whom God has placed us. We have to take care that by our good works which they shall behold, they may glorify God when He shall come to visit and try the hearts and the motives of men.

Upon the early Christians was put the responsibility of proving by their lives the truth which they preached. If they had been false to it—if, while preaching God's righteousness and judgment, the holiness and love and redemption of their Master Christ, they had failed to live a life which suited their profession, what would have become of that gospel which they were charged to establish in the world? Who would have believed them if, while preaching goodness, they had been selfish, worldly, unmerciful? Who would have attended to them, if, besides all that was so strange, so unearthly in their teaching, they had seemed no more in earnest about what they spoke of than other men? We know how little the world was of itself disposed to receive their words; how it scoffed,

reviled, insulted them ; the one thing which forced it to listen, the one thing against which scoffs and slanders fell harmless, was their manifest, undeniable, untiring goodness. *That* at last did make their enemies, did make the world, in general, ashamed of speaking against them as evil-doers. That at last did put to silence the vain ignorance of foolish men, giving the worst names to that which was to save the world. And so the truth prevailed.

My brethren, as it prevailed at first, so must it prevail, and be kept in its strength and victory all through. The same responsibility has descended upon us—the responsibility of handing on the truth which has come down to us ; of handing it on as it has been preserved to us, by the earnestness of life, the real goodness and purity of word and deed and spirit, without which it would have long ago perished ; without seeing which, in those from whom we received the gospel, we should never have believed and accepted it. Those round us, those who are to come after us, will not much heed our words ; they will only believe our lives. And on each one of us, in his own place, high or low, comes a part of this responsibility ; each, according to the duty which comes to him to do, is God's witness, if he does his duty ; each helps and confirms his brethren, in believing that goodness, and truth, and righteousness, are real and serious things, according as he shows himself that he feels them to be real and serious. It won't do to talk on the right side, and think so to be fulfilling the responsibility of helping it forward.

It won't do to agree with and praise those who do their duty in earnest, and to let them be religious for us. We have each of us part of this work to do ourselves; and our own part none but we can do.

Oh, let us think of those old days, when those to whom we owe our knowledge of God and Christ were reckoned the worst for being in reality the best of men. What had they to face?—and how bravely, how meekly, and yet how triumphantly did they face it all! “Finally, brethren,” writes St. Paul, “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, . . . whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” And for writing and preaching these and such like things, St. Paul was called an enemy of the human race.

God has given us peace, which He denied to His great servant of that time. God has made our duty, for the most part, so easy to us. Let us not requite Him by living so that those who see us doubt whether we seriously have any belief in the goodness and truth and hope spoken of in the Bible. Let us try in earnest so to live, that when the trial of what is really in our hearts shall come, they who watch us, and judge us, and perhaps are greatly influenced for good or for evil by what they see, may, “by the good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day

of visitation." God has showed us light that we might be fellow-helpers with Him in His divine work of enlightening all that is dark, of purifying all that is corrupt. The apostle, in the text, remembers and repeats his Master's words from the sermon on the Mount. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

XXIII

OVERCOMING THE WORLD

“These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—ST. JOHN xvi. 33.

WITH these words our Lord ended His long, farewell discourse to His apostles. With these words He took leave of them, as far as His earthly ministry was concerned; and then turned to His Father in prayer for Himself and for them. “Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son.” They were on the eve of a great, an overwhelming sorrow. They were going to begin a life like to that of their Master on earth—a life of distress and trouble, of persecution and suffering. So He gave them warning of it. But with the warning He also gave a promise. Great was to be their trial, but greater still their comfort. Strong were to be the enemies whom they were going to encounter, but stronger still the grace by which they were to be upheld in the good fight. “In Me ye shall have peace”; that precious thing which in the world they could not have. “In the world ye shall have tribulation”; they could expect no better lot than their Master. “But be of good

cheer"—do not be afraid, or despair of the victory—"I," even I whom you know so well, whose love you may trust, "I have overcome the world."

The words are our heritage also; the warning and the promise. Our portion of tribulation may not be, is not at all likely to be, that of the apostles; but we shall be strange men, indeed, if it is not true of us as it was of them, that "in the world ye shall have tribulation." Most of us have already found it true; some perhaps know but little of the world except its tribulations. But sooner or later, come they will, in one shape or another, light or heavy, for a short time or for long, according as God judges best for us; according, too, as we draw them down on our heads by our follies or our sins. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," must come true to those who are living in a world of sin, of pain, and of death.

The warning, the sad and heavy part of these words, we cannot escape, whether we are Christ's servants or not. But shall this be all, in which the words are to come true of us? For in this saying of our Master Christ the warning is the least part of it. The warning is thrown into the shade by the brightness of the promise. The warning is brought in as a reason for speaking of the promise. And if the warning was meant for us all, surely so was the promise. It is true that we, as well as Christ's apostles, must expect tribulation in the world. But it is true of us as of them, that in Him we, too, may have peace—were meant to have peace; that for us as well

as for them, He has overcome the world. "Be of good cheer" belongs to us also. The worst that can befall His own in this world He has overcome.

How has Christ overcome the world, so that in Him we may have peace?

1. Christ has overcome the world by overcoming sin, and the consequences of sin. He overcame the world by becoming a sacrifice for our sins, by taking the sting out of sin and death, on the cross and in the resurrection.

For what is it that makes the troubles of this life so heavy, but the sin which we feel deserves them; the sin which shuts off the hope of relief, which we feel makes God angry with us; and which hardens our heart against God. Sin unpardoned—felt in the midst of our trouble to be unpardoned—is the poison which works so fearfully in the wounds which sorrow and trouble make. That which made this world so miserable, as well as so dangerous to the soul, was the reign and dominion of sin, and the not knowing how sin could be got rid of, or how it was to be taken away and forgiven. If sin were really a master, whose yoke could not be shaken off, what was there to encourage men to do better; what was there to make them strive against the world's temptations, or to keep them from sinking in despair under its tribulations? If sins, once committed, could never be wiped away, could never be forgiven any more than they could be undone, and there remained only the feeling that God was for ever angry with us, and a "fearful looking for of judgment" and punishment, what would men do

but try and drown the dreadful thought, in rushing more wildly into all the temptations of the world? The world was all powerful till Christ took away the sins of men, and opened the way to forgiveness, and holiness, and peace. He overcame the world by dying that we might henceforth hope that our sins would not be remembered against us. He overcame the world by taking out the sting of sin—the sting of sin, which is the feeling that it has separated us from God, the feeling that it cannot be forgiven, cannot be overcome. He died and He rose again, that henceforward sinners might have hope; that henceforward they might feel themselves in the world, not as rebels against God, without any opening of mercy by which they might return to Him, but as His reconciled creatures and subjects, His servants, His chosen ones, His sons. Christ overcame the world by overcoming the great power of evil in the world; by conquering sin Himself, and by opening to mankind the way of escape and victory over sin.

2. Christ overcame the world by showing of how little value this world is in comparison of the next; by making us see, side by side, the present and that which is to come—things temporal and things eternal.

How great does this world seem to us while we think only of it! How tempting, how pleasant its good things; how terrible and overwhelming its sorrows; how delightful to have it all on our side, how painful to have the world against us, frowning on us, laughing at us, doing us mischief. Yes, when this present world is all in all to us, it is a

very powerful world, whether to do us good or evil—very powerful, as long as we are living. But let us go forward a few years. Let us have come to our last day and hour. Let us feel that our last sun has risen, our last sun has set; that all our life is gone but a few hours; and then what does the world appear to us? All its glory, all its beauty, all its delights, all its storms and terrors—what are they all to us at such a moment? Whether we have hope in Christ or not, at least we have nothing more to hope for, and nothing more to fear, from the world which once was so powerful over our souls. But the hour of death is but a late time for finding out the real value and measure of the world; and it is not we, either, who then overcome the world; it is death that overcomes it; death that overcomes it and us together. Cannot the world be overcome before? Yes, it can. Christ overcame it for us long ago. Christ showed, if we would but see and believe Him, Christ showed plainly enough what is the value and worth of this world in itself. Christ showed it, if we would but open our eyes—showed it as clearly as we shall one day see it, at the hour of approaching death. Christ opened to us a new world, and showed us that kingdom of His Father of which we knew nothing before. He told us of those many mansions where He was going to prepare a place for them that loved Him; of that day which has no night, of that life which knows no death, of hearts that are never stained or darkened by sin, of eyes that never weep, of faces that are never dimmed with sorrow, of bodies that

never suffer pain or grow old, of a city whose God is served continually, of a temple where His countenance is ever seen, and His praises ever sung. That is, indeed, to overcome this world; to tell us, to assure us of another world, which shall last for ever when this one perishes, which shall receive us to immortality and endless peace, when in weakness and anguish, with worn out bodies and weary souls, we part from this one.

By opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers, Christ has overcome this present world, its temptations and its sorrows, not at the moment only when we are going to have done with it for ever, but in the very noonday of its glory, and the deepest darkness of its distress. Christ has overcome it, not for Himself alone, but for all who will receive the victory from His hands. Their eyes He opens to behold the mystery of the unseen future. Their hearts He strengthens to despise the dreams of to-day, and to choose instead the glory that shall be revealed. Into their mouths He puts the apostle's triumphant hymn, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate

come the world, and you shall overcome it too. It is not by looking on ourselves that we shall wean ourselves from it, or find that we are not afraid of its terrors. It is not by depending on our own strength, and our own thoughts, that we shall have peace. Peace must come to us, not from anything in this world, but from that holy place on high, where God gives of that peace which is His own, to angels and men. Christ is ascended there, that from thence that peace might flow down on us, amid the changes and troubles of the world. Only let us believe Him. Only let us believe that He can give us His peace; and that, in all the changes and chances of this mortal life, that peace can keep our hearts unmoved and safe. The world is overcome by Christ; it can do us no harm while we are under His shadow. Oh, before the storm comes, or the fierce temptation, or before our hearts are hardened by the deceitfulness of the world, let us pray Him to increase our faith; to help us really to believe in what He has done for us, and what He has told us, so that we may see at once what we must see one day or other—the worth of this present world, and may learn to look forward to that brighter and more blessed hope which He has left us, of being one day “with Him where He is.”

XXIV

THE BLESSEDNESS OF TEMPTATION

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.”—ST. JAMES i. 12.

I SHOULD think most people, if they acknowledged honestly what they felt, would think that this is one of the hard sayings of Scripture. We may believe it, looking at it at a distance, as it were; but is it a saying which we should be able to welcome very cordially, if applied to ourselves? Do we like to think of ourselves being dealt with, and called to this happiness? No, we must own that it goes against what is held desirable by flesh and blood. It is of the same kind as other declarations of Scripture about blessedness, which we listen to with a kind of awe, to think that God should set forth as so eminently to be desired, what we naturally shrink from so earnestly. It makes us, in a way, tremble in our secret souls, when we hear our Lord pronouncing His blessing and His warning on conditions of life which, of ourselves, we look at in an exactly opposite light. “Blessed be ye poor.” “Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.” “Blessed are ye that hunger now.” “Woe unto

come the world, and you shall overcome it too. It is not by looking on ourselves that we shall wean ourselves from it, or find that we are not afraid of its terrors. It is not by depending on our own strength, and our own thoughts, that we shall have peace. Peace must come to us, not from anything in this world, but from that holy place on high, where God gives of that peace which is His own, to angels and men. Christ is ascended there, that from thence that peace might flow down on us, amid the changes and troubles of the world. Only let us believe Him. Only let us believe that He can give us His peace; and that, in all the changes and chances of this mortal life, that peace can keep our hearts unmoved and safe. The world is overcome by Christ; it can do us no harm while we are under His shadow. Oh, before the storm comes, or the fierce temptation, or before our hearts are hardened by the deceitfulness of the world, let us pray Him to increase our faith; to help us really to believe in what He has done for us, and what He has told us, so that we may see at once what we must see one day or other—the worth of this present world, and may learn to look forward to that brighter and more blessed hope which He has left us, of being one day “with Him where He is.”

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you that are full! for ye shall hunger." "Blessed are ye that weep now." "Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." "Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and cast out your name as evil." "Woe unto you when all men shall speak good of you." It requires us to take in the thought of the next life, in order to prevail upon ourselves to accept these sayings. Our minds naturally struggle against them, and cannot be reconciled to them. And until we carry them on in our thoughts to that other world, where what is but begun in this world is to be ended and explained and made perfect, they are to us as words which we dare not contradict, and yet can hardly embrace. It requires the parable of the rich man and Lazarus to make us feel how true is the saying, "Blessed are the poor." It requires us to think where the apostle Paul is now, after that weary life of his of suffering and reproach, to believe in earnest that it was with soberness and truth that it was said, "Blessed are ye that weep now . . . Blessed are ye when men shall hate you . . . and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake." Without that thought, without that hope, St. Paul himself confesses that they who accept his Master's word, and take his Master's view of life, are of all men the most miserable.

So with this saying of St. James, "Blessed is he that endureth temptation." Take temptation to mean either the great trials of a man's virtue and patience—such as the temptations to Solomon of his great prosperity, or the temptations of Job in his terrible afflictions—or else take it to mean the

continual trials which every man is undergoing every day that he lives, from all the events, and persons, and pleasures, and vexations, which come across his path ; the word of God sees a good and a blessing in this. We cannot naturally say the same. So far as we feel it to be a trial and temptation, to that extent we cannot help having the feeling which we must have to a burden, a disturbing trouble, or a danger. We wish ourselves out of it ; we wish others out of it. It is hard to feel that it is necessary for us, that there is good to be got from it ; that the day may come when we shall see how much the happier we are for it, how we could not have done without it ; or else when we shall find how much we have lost, what damage and mischief we have sustained, by not looking such a trial in the face, and accepting it as an appointment of God, out of love and goodwill towards us, and for our benefit. It is hard to feel this. And yet, with such solemn words of Scripture, surely it is worth while to think about it, and to try and see, and appreciate what it means. Let us then briefly consider the facts of the case, about that condition of being tried and tempted, of which St. James speaks. Let us consider it under three points of view : (1) Let us see how useless it is to think of escaping the universal lot of being tried ; (2) That the right way is, not to shrink from or indulge vain wishes against this appointment of God, but boldly to meet and face our trials, whatever they are ; and (3) Let us see whether, indeed, it is not after all abundantly true that "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

I. Why are we in this life at all? Is it not that our hearts may be tried and proved of what stuff they really are made—whether we have it in us to do our duty, and fulfil God's purposes in doing such wonders in our behalf; whether we have it in us to do our great Master worthy service, and to rise up, step by step, to a likeness to His image, and to attain something of His holiness, His goodness, and His love? Every one says that this is our trial place; the place where we have time given us to show what we are, and what we are willing to do; the place where we are searched out and proved—exercised like soldiers getting ready for the war—examined like gold and silver when its real value is to be ascertained—proved, as we prove tools and machinery of steel and iron, to see if they are tough and sound enough for their work, whether they are hard enough in temper to bear an edge, and fine enough in quality for men to buy them. But what is a trial place without trials? If we are to be proved and searched out, that which tries and proves us must be something which really does show what we can bear, and what we cannot bear; what we can do, and what we have not strength, or courage, or principle, to do. It must be something which either we succeed or fail in. It must be something, with the danger accompanying it, that if we cannot bear the trial, if we are overcome by it and cannot hold our ground, we are so much the worse for it. It must be something which calls forth our strength, which gives us trouble, perhaps pain and self-denial, to do or to bear; it is no trial else. And never in this

world is success won without paying for it beforehand in hard work and exertion.

This is the meaning of that unending state of trial which every one in the world is going through now. Very variously are men tried. Some seem overwhelmed by the number and greatness of the difficulties into which they are thrown; or the losses, the afflictions, the disappointments which are showered upon them. We see *they* are being tried: but so are they too being tried in a different way, who seem to have none of these things; who seem to go through life without check or difficulty or heartache; who seem to have all that they can wish for, and nothing to embitter it. Their trial is their prosperity. God tries their hearts by seeing how they can bear not to be contradicted or crossed or disappointed. And who will dare to say that this is not a trial to tremble at? Gently tried they are, no doubt, by that divine Love and Wisdom, which deals what is best, what each can best bear; which weighs justly each man's advantages and condition, and knows what He expects from each; but even where human eyes cannot see the trial, we may be quite sure that in the eyes of Him who weighs hearts, and searches out the reins, and to whom no secrets are hid, the trial is going on surely and steadily. Some are tried by great troubles and crosses; others are guarded from great temptations, and are left to meet continual little ones. Their path is sheltered from the storm of ill-treatment, or evil-speaking; from the gaps made by the hand of death: but there are the little trials of temper, the little rubs and roughnesses and disagreeables which cannot

be got rid of in their secret homes ; some void in their hearts which they cannot fill up or speak of ; some thorn in the flesh which they cannot pull out, and which daily galls and frets them. And perhaps it is because, if their trial was a great or a public one, a trial once for all, they could pluck up strength and overcome it : but by these little trials they are daily worsted ; daily worsted, perhaps, that they may learn the lesson of humility and endurance, and never trust in themselves in great things, when they find themselves so easily vanquished in small ones.

And never does this state of trial come to an end. The particular trial and temptation may, but not the state of trial itself. One trial is overcome and disappears ; but another comes at once into its place, to challenge us again to show our heart, our courage, our faith. For we have lost our title to rest and ease ; it is a blessing that we have the chance given us here to regain, for a day which is yet to come. When we have borne the heavy blow, which has perhaps taken from us one whom we loved, then comes the long course of daily life, in which we have to learn to do without our best and wisest adviser, our most faithful stay. When Christ had overcome the devil in the wilderness, then came, one after another, the temptations of every day, from the thankless or the selfish or the malicious men around Him. The great conflict at the threshold of His course ended in victory ; then came, without ceasing, the vexations, the sorrows, the hardships, of His ministry of love which was not believed, and His

deeds of mercy received with thankless hardness of heart.

2. And now as to the right way to meet our trials. We sometimes think that we can run away from them. "If I was only in another place," we say, "I should not be burdened with this which tries my temper. If I could only change my work, I should not be tempted to this laziness and this dislike of trouble. If I could only have companions whom I liked better, I should not be so tempted to ill-nature and selfishness; I should be raised up to higher and worthier feelings." Oh, vain and self-deceiving thought! As if trial does not pursue us wherever we go; it may change its nature, but who can tell whether it may not change to a stronger and more dangerous trial? And if we cannot stand a trial which we are accustomed to and understand, how can we flatter ourselves that we should do better in trials which are unknown and untried? There are cases and times, doubtless, where change is wise; where we are being tempted in a way which makes it right to fly from the temptation. But never let us flatter ourselves that by going away from one kind of trial we get away from all trial. Temptation and trial do not *cause* men's weakness, they only show it if it is there. And trials not only show us what we really are, which we might not know without them; but used as God would have us use them, faced, borne, and overcome, they make us what we could not have become without them. Little and great, they are God's lessons; His practising school; His way of teaching and perfecting. No book learning or

head knowledge would make a soldier, a workman, a farmer. There must be many efforts, many mistakes, many failures, before a practical man of any kind has learnt his business. And no fair-weather knowledge of the beauty of religion ; no feelings of the excellence of trusting God ; of the charm of heavenly love, of the delight of serving Christ, will make us know the truths by which the Christian soul is trained up and strengthened in all that is good, and pure, and holy. Not till we have tasted something of our Saviour's cross do we know what patience means. Not till we have tried our own strength on occasions when our pride has been called out, or our wishes have been crossed, or we have felt the burden of the perverseness or folly or bad temper of others, do we know how weak we are ; not till then do we accept that wholesome rebuke and humiliation in our own esteem, which makes us feel that we want a greater strength than our own. Not till we have learnt something of the slipperiness and unstableness of our good purposes can we feel the need of that watchfulness and prayer and constant dependence on our Saviour's grace, which alone can bring our strivings after better things to any effect. It is in these ways, by meeting trials, great and small—small, that is, in seeming, for nothing is really small which tries whether our heart and soul is in earnest in what is right and good—that we are to grow in grace and goodness. It is in these ways, by meeting trials of all sorts ; by trying to do their best in them, that God's saints have become fitted to fight the good fight when on

earth, and to persevere unto the end; it is by often failing, but sometimes succeeding; by going on from one kind of trial to another; by not getting tired, and not allowing themselves to think that they need take no more trouble; it is by stirring themselves up by the remembrance and the grace of Christ our Lord, not to shrink from what is uncomfortable, not to mind shame if they are doing right, not to be discouraged by ill success, not to lose patience or be weary of the length of trial; it is in these ways that they have become perfect at last in that kingdom of God, where, after the trials of this life are over, they have slept the sleep of peace, to awake to their Master's glory and His reward.

3. And to such can even the man of this world deny that the Scripture saying has turned out true? "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried," when he is found by proof to be true and real in his faith and love, "he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." To him the blessedness of trial is no strange or unnatural blessedness which man on earth cannot understand. Look forward long enough, my brethren, and you can understand it even if you cannot share it. You can understand the calm and peace even here which a man must find when, after having been long tried, he has kept his course, he has overcome temptation, he has won what he fought for, he has felt the strength of heavenly goodness and grace gathering daily in his soul, he has come to see—and no long way off—the end, the victorious, the perfect end and consummation

of the trial to which God has put him. Then he sees why he was called to be so proved and searched out. Then he sees why he was not left alone in sloth and ease, having everything to his wish, to delude himself into the belief that he had a goodness which he did not possess, and a strength which was in reality unsound and untrustworthy. Then he sees why pain, and hard work, and effort, were necessary to call out what was good in him—to chasten, correct, refine, confirm it. If he has learnt in any degree to overcome himself, he knows that he never could have learnt it, but for the discipline of having had to meet temptation and wrestle with it. If he has learnt to check anger or ill-nature, he learnt it when things happened to make him angry or ill-natured, and he strove not to be so; and perhaps at a great sacrifice of pride or inclination, hardly and painfully succeeded. But what a joy now to look back on those once trying struggles; and who would have been without them, now that they have yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness to him who has been exercised in them? No, my brethren, there is no joy on earth like that of having conquered a difficulty—a real, a hard, a trying difficulty. And there is no conquest or difficulty comparable to that of a man who has gained the victory over what was evil and base, and unworthy, and unrighteous, in himself; who looks back, and traces the effect of trial—of defeat, of humiliation, it may be, for a while, but at last of honest and faithful endeavours to do right—on his once unruly and rebellious spirit. He can thankfully look back on his life, and see why God made it so chequered, perhaps,

but at any rate so full of crosses and surprises, of mortifying proofs of his own weakness and vanity; why God made so many things hard to him, so many things distasteful, so many things perplexing, so many things difficult to put up with. There is no joy like his who has learnt by experience to see that, without having been tried in good earnest, he would have been a miserable self-deceiver, growing old in sin; but who sees also that God has counted him worthy of being tried, and that, by God's grace, he has not altogether made God's gracious purpose towards him of none effect.

We are all of us undergoing our trial—depend upon that. Whether we know it or not, whether it be by trouble or by prosperity, whether it be by a few great trials or many small ones, things are happening to each of us which are putting our hearts to the proof, and showing in the eyes of God what is in them. We are each one of us undergoing our trial. This is one thing. And another thing is, that it will soon be over. If we are vainly trying to evade it, or if we are being overcome, and are found wanting in our trial, it will soon be over, and it is the struggle for our soul. If we recognize it as our trial, but find it a hard and weary thing to have to meet it every day—yet, it is not for much longer—it will soon be over. The great point is, what fruit has it borne in us? What are the results of having gone through our trial? Have we learnt the lesson which God meant by it to teach us? While our trials have been showing us what we were, while they have been offering us opportunities of correcting what was amiss, and

strengthening what was good, have we been profiting by the experience, and turning the opportunities to account?

That is the great question for each of us. How are we meeting our trial, our temptations; how we are getting ready for that time when all our lives will have to be weighed in the awful balance of God's judgment, after which there will be no more trial? Then it must be either victory or failure for ever—the crown won, or the crown missed, once for all. Let us not shut our eyes to whatever God may be sending on us for our trial. Let us not treat it carelessly or lightly, as if it did not much matter how we behaved under it. Let us not despair or give up because we have often failed under it, and are tempted to think it above our strength. Let us be patient with ourselves, patient with our own mistakes and defeats; and hope and strive on in spite of them. And we shall learn to bear our own trial better, if we sympathize with others in theirs. None of us is without many a scar and wound in that warfare. None but has his short-comings, none without his burden; no one is sufficient for himself, no one wise and strong enough by himself alone. We need to bear with one another, to comfort one another, jointly to aid, to encourage one another. No one can tell what help a man receives to bear and meet his own trial, who honestly and heartily, gently and humbly, tries to help his brother to bear his, and to smooth his way to come out of it a wiser man and a stronger Christian. So therefore let us meet our trials; not flinching,

not seeking by outward change to avoid the real inward battle, which must be won or lost in the heart ; not hindering but helping, not disheartening but encouraging one another. Let us endure in our Master's strength, as long as He sees good for us that we should be tried. We shall not complain of the severity of the trial when, at the end, we shall see the reason of it, and rejoice in its reward.

XXV

ASHAMED OF CHRIST

“For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.—ST. LUKE ix. 26.

THIS is an awful doom to look forward to—that when we have to meet Christ, and His Father, and His holy angels, He should be ashamed of us, He should turn His face away from us, He should refuse to acknowledge us as those for whom He can do anything, He should leave us to that fate, which, without His help, we cannot escape. And yet one is inclined to think, at first sight, that so far as it depends on our being ashamed of Christ there is not so much to fear. There is much that is wrong among us. But being ashamed of Christ, ashamed of being known as His disciples, ashamed of His name and religion, does not seem, at first sight, one of our shortcomings, or one of our dangers. At least, if being called a Christian, and professing to belong to His Church and society, means that we are not ashamed of Him, men, nowadays, can hardly be said to be ashamed of Him. It is not many who, in this sense, would be ashamed

to confess before the world that they are His, and worship His name. And so, perhaps, the thought crosses our minds, whether these words have much to do with us and our days ; whether they are not words spoken specially to the early disciples, meant for them, not meant for us.

For, no doubt, at first, confessing Christ was a very different thing from what it is now. When first the gospel was preached among men, not to be ashamed of Christ meant nothing more or less than that a man was ready to leave everything in this world, and to die for Christ. When all the world, Jews and Gentiles, were against Christ and His gospel, it was a matter of life and death—not to be ashamed of Him. When men were brought before kings and rulers, and simply told that, unless they would deny Christ, they should be thrown to the wild beasts, or burned alive, or be sent to prison, or to labour like convicts all the rest of their days, there was some reason to warn men that to be ashamed of Christ was to save their lives in this world, in order to lose their souls in the next. Or when almost everybody whom a man might meet during the day, or had anything to do with in his business or his amusements, took for granted that the gospel was mere folly, and that every one who followed it was the most stupid and obstinate of bigots—when at every turn men were liable to be laughed at, mocked, reviled, trampled upon, for believing and obeying Christ—then, these words might be a very seasonable warning to keep them from being jeered and shamed out of their hope and profession. In such days as were when the

gospel was new to the world, we can understand men being tempted to be ashamed of Christ, and we can understand the solemnity of Christ's warning to them.

Another time followed, even after the gospel had won its way among men, and was outwardly set up in the world. There came times when, though everybody was in name and outwardly a Christian, those who really chose to be what they professed to be had no easy time of it. There came a time when, though it was the fashion to be called a Christian, it was the fashion also to look black or to sneer at those who tried to be something more than this, and to make religion a reality; a time when loose and careless people felt the reproach and rebuke to themselves, of any one being in earnest in believing what all professed; a time when the world, without giving up the name of Christ, made a set at all who seemed to be His real followers; when a man could not be even a little more religious than his neighbours without being called names, and when, if he really tried throughout to make the Bible the law of his life he was in danger of losing a great deal in this world, of being thought a fool who must be put down and discouraged, of meeting at every turn annoyance and vexation. At such a time as this there would be good reason to think of Christ's words. At such a time, when at any moment a man might meet mockery, and contempt, and ill-nature, in trying to be religious, it would be very necessary to keep in mind what Christ says about being ashamed of Him.

But, here at least, those times have passed away, at any rate for the present. No one can now fairly say that a man is worse thought of in the world for seeming to be strict in religion. Any man, honestly comparing those times with times not so far back, must confess that the open profession of religion does no one any hurt in life, exposes him to no special mockery or insult, causes no unfavourable or unpleasant feelings towards him. What is there to be ashamed of now in confessing Christ's name, in seeming to be in earnest about serving Him faithfully? The world takes no more notice of it against him than it does of his worldly calling. So far from its going against him, he will stand higher and have more credit with his neighbours, he will be more trusted and respected for it. So, we may think, what have we to do now with those words of Christ, when there is nothing to be ashamed of in owning His name; when the last thing that would stop a man from becoming religious would be the feeling that, in doing so, he would have something to be ashamed of among his friends?

But this must not lead us into mistakes. This easiness in being religious, which without contradiction is greater nowadays than it ever was in the world since Christ came into it, must not blind us to the spirit of our Lord's words. The words have a meaning still. There is such a thing still as being ashamed of Christ and of His words; and while men are men, there will be meaning and warning in them to the world's end. The world may let us have ample liberty in taking up religion and acknowledging it publicly in our words

and ways. But the world must change, the world must be the world no longer, before we can hope to be rid of the temptation to be ashamed of Christ and of His words. "Ashamed of Christ," we say to ourselves: "who can think us so? We own His name. We never laugh at any one for being in earnest in religion. We wish everybody to know that we honour Him and His gospel." So we say to ourselves. There is no timidity or backwardness in our religious expressions. They are hearty, frank, bold; not the words of people ashamed of what they are. Yes, as long as it is a mere matter of general profession—and by *general* I do not mean necessarily pretended or outside profession. For there may be a general, cloudy, imperfect sort of religion, which does not like to go into particulars, and shirks particular duties; and yet this, though imperfect, need not be mere outside or pretence. But it is in the *general* that we are so brave and bold in professing not to be ashamed of Christ. Let there come some duty, which is not the fashion among people round us, and then let us see what we do; whether we have courage to face remarks; to seem to be singular; not to mind being a little talked about for doing what the general opinion does not think necessary, or in which perhaps it goes against us. Let there come some awkward moment when we feel that we ought in some great, or still more, in some seemingly small matter, to avow what we think right; to bear witness to what we think true; to raise our voice against what we think wrong. Then is the time to see whether there is not still room in the world for a

man to be ashamed of Christ and of His words; whether that sharp trial of which Christ spoke, and which it is so terrible to fail in, has quite disappeared from the state of life to which we have been called.

For the plain truth is, that to be ashamed of Christ and of His words, means, to be ashamed of anything that we know to be right. It is very well not to be ashamed of Christ where there is nothing to put us to shame. When the world keeps us in countenance there is no reason to feel shame. And the world now keeps us in countenance, in a general way at least, in openly and publicly professing Christ's service and faith. But Christ did not call us to a mere profession; He did not call us to obey His words only just so far as the world is willing that we should obey them. He called us to do right, *whatever* was right. He called us to own His name and words, not merely by being in earnest in letting them give a certain stamp and turn to our lives and ways; but by doing as He did, by following what we know to be right, wherever it appears. If what is right is common among us, if it is easy and a matter of course to do something that is right, of course it is just as much as ever a good thing to do it. Christ will be pleased with it if it is right, even if it is not difficult to do; even if we can do it without feeling any reason to be ashamed before men. But if what is right happens not to be the common way among men, or where we live, then still do what is right. If it is against the fashion, still do it. If people laugh at you for it; if they make ill-natured

remarks ; if you cannot do it without the pain of feeling that hard eyes are upon you, and unkind and sharp tongues are busy making game of you ; if you cannot do it without blushing and tingling cheeks, still do it. It does not cease to be right because it happens to be disagreeable. It is Christ's word, if you know that it is right. If you shrink from it, because it is so unpleasant to be sneered at or called hard names, or to have sharp things said of you, you are being ashamed of Christ and of His words.

And now, are there none of such cases which meet us in the course of our lives still ; cases where we see and feel what is right to do, what we ought to do, but where we are kept back by being ashamed ; by the fear of what will be thought and said of us ; by the fear of looking people in the face afterwards, whose countenance will be changed towards us ; whose eye we shall not like to meet ; to whose words we shall not know exactly what to answer ; whose laugh and sneer and scorn will be more than we can bear ?

Happy are we indeed if there are not : happy, and very different from men in general. For there are few who do not find this shame and fear of men often crossing their path, when they have to obey their conscience, which is calling them to some known and acknowledged duty. Only let us examine what happens in our ordinary talk and discourse with one another. How often do we not feel something which we ought to say, which our heart burns within us to say, which our conscience condemns us as cowards for not saying, but which

we are afraid to say, for fear people should think us too strict, or should laugh at us for affecting to be more particular, more charitable, more just, than our neighbours. Some ill-natured story is told, which we inwardly feel is not likely to be true; but we are ashamed to go against the stream. We listen to it, and talk of it, just as if we believed it true, when in reality we do not; yet we dare not lift up our voice in our neighbour's defence, even to ask people to wait and see before they judge. Or we hear some matter talked about, on which people's opinions seem to go all one way, and, it may be, the loudest and boldest talker talks down the rest and carries them with him; and we have an opinion of our own, which does not agree with the common one, and we feel that things are said which are unfair and unjust; and yet, because we know we should be laughed at or brow-beaten for saying them, we hold our tongue, and let what we believe to be truth be trampled to scorn, as if it were falsehood, with no one to say a word for it. Or we have to listen to companions, against whose talk our soul within us turns and revolts with loathing; filthy words, unclean jesting, the tempting of younger and weaker ones to sin, the laughing them out of what is right and innocent—and we know that we ought to speak, we know that we ought to deliver our own souls at least, by showing that we dislike and condemn it; but we are afraid, we are ashamed, we don't like to draw the laugh on our heads. And so, perhaps, for fear our companions should think us too particular, we join in the talk which inwardly disgusts

us, we join in the sneer and mockery which we condemn, we join in the persecution which we are afraid of for ourselves, even in what we feel to be truly the devil's work, the tempting others to the sin, which, if we were not cowards, we should not ever do ourselves. Or again—what is there more common, in the life of every one, man or woman, boy or girl, than for something to come about, when it is very awkward, very uncomfortable, very painful, it may be, very full of shame, to have to confess the truth; when the quickest and readiest and safest way to get out of it is, or at least seems to be, to tell a lie instead of the truth; cases where the lie seems to do no harm to any one—where there is nothing to stop you from telling the lie but the knowledge that it is wrong, and that God's eye is on you. And when these cases have happened what have we done? What does our conscience tell us we have chosen—the lie, with its ease and convenience, or the truth with its uncomfortable-ness and shame? And can we say, with all these things coming across us continually, that the day is past when we need concern ourselves with Christ's warning against being ashamed of Him? Wherever and whenever we have been ashamed of what we knew to be right, we have been ashamed of Christ.

And in matters of direct religious observance and duty, we must not be in a hurry to think that we are never ashamed of Christ. I don't suppose that any one here would be ashamed of confessing that he owed Christ for his Master. Everybody round us does the same. But to be clear about

the matter, we ought to ask ourselves how it is with us when everybody round us does *not* do, as we feel in ourselves that we ought to do? We come to church when it is the fashion to do so. Do we come when it is the fashion not to come? We, perhaps, find it easy and natural to come, because we have been always accustomed to come. Let us be honest with ourselves, and ask ourselves, whether if we had been accustomed for a long time *not* to come, we should still make the change now, and come, even though no one else broke through the custom and came. In one place everybody comes, as a matter of course; no one thinks of not coming. In another, people have got into the way of not coming, or coming only now and then, or coming to one particular service. And then, how hard it is to get any one to make a beginning—to do differently from what his neighbours know he has been used to do, and so to confess, in a sort of way, that he ought to have done differently before. Where we are so shy of doing differently from other people, when there can be no manner of doubt what is right, is there not some danger of our being in reality ashamed of Christ and of His words, when they come home to us, not in a general way, but as a particular duty? And again—how many persons know that they ought to come to the Lord's Table—know and acknowledge what the Lord's command is; and not only that, but in their hearts would like to come, and wish that other people came more commonly, wish that it was the fashion to come; but yet they stay away because they are ashamed to do what

other people don't do, because they are afraid of meeting other people, and being asked sneering questions, and being said to be setting themselves up, and making more pretence of religion than their neighbours. They stay away because they are ashamed to confess Christ and His words before men.

I don't think that it is quite so easy as it might seem at first, even in our days, to go through life without being ashamed of our Master and His service, even though there is no one to make us suffer loss for His sake, even though we may be serious and in earnest, without even being called nicknames. Whenever we are ashamed of what is right, and true, and just, we are in reality being ashamed of Christ. Whenever we are ashamed or afraid to do what is right, we are ashamed of Christ. And you must know of your own selves, how often, how sadly often, that temptation happens to us, if not in great things at least in small. And when great things are not our trial then small things are. When our faith and obedience to Christ are not tried by the heavy fear of death, or public disgrace, or worldly loss, by which our fathers before us have been proved, they are tried, by what may be quite as great and searching a trial, by the way in which we can stand temptation in small things, in the common matters of life. Let us not then think that we may safely and without harm be ashamed of Christ in what seem to us small things. Let us not say to ourselves, "I could not be ashamed of Him if I was publicly brought to answer for my faith; but it will be no matter

if I am ashamed of Him in trifles—if I laugh with the scorners, and mock with the mockers, if I tell small lies to save my credit and convenience, if I don't put myself out of the way, by saying my prayers when others do not, or coming to church when it is the custom not to come."

Christ said a word, which your own common sense must see the truth of: "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." If you cannot stand the light trial of a frown or a laugh, of a harsh word, or a passing jest, how could you hope to stand the fiery trial to which so many of Christ's servants have been called? How could you possibly hope that you would not be ashamed of Him, with the whole world, the rich, the powerful, the crowds, all against you—all condemning you as an impostor, and laughing you to scorn as a fool? If you cannot stand out for what is right, because it is doing differently from your neighbours, how could you stand out for it when it might cost you your life?

Let us ask ourselves in good earnest, what hope we have that in real serious trials we are confessing Christ? What fear is there that we are being often ashamed of Him and of His words? And the warning has its corresponding promise. If the trial may be in small things, so may the victory be. Don't think that He will consider it of small account, how you *do* face shame in order to keep your conscience clear, and to do what is right. Don't think that He does not mark the pain, and the triumph over pain, when, without liking to

put yourself forward, you do raise your voice, it may be singly, to say the truth, to defend the truth. Don't think that He is indifferent when the tempting way of easy falsehood is on one side, and the smart and shame, of some uncomfortable acknowledgment, on the other—and for His sake you leave the falsehood and choose the smart and shame. He knows what He has given you to do. He knows its importance in exercising your faith, in practising you to be true Christian men and women, boys and girls. And all He looks at is, how you do it. If you are ashamed of Christ, and fear the laugh or taunt and jeer of men more, you know His warning—"him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven." If in your humble battle, your trifling trial, your unmarked and unknown difficulties and strugglings for what is right and true, you are the conqueror—for you, as well as for the martyr at the stake, or the outcast for the truth's sake, stands the promise written, "Fear ye not therefore . . . whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in heaven."

XXVI

ELIJAH

“Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain : and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.”—ST. JAMES v. 17.

WHAT are we meant to learn from the life and character of the prophet Elijah? Why is his example set before us in the Bible so fully, and read at such length in church in the lessons? For of all the servants of God spoken of in the Old Testament there is none in character more different from what we are accustomed to, more completely unlike all that we commonly think of as natural and fitting, according to our manner of life, than this great prophet. What has he to do with us, the solitary prophet of the wilderness, fighting his life and death battle with the idolatrous king and queen of Israel, slaying the prophets of Baal on Carmel, and flying for his own life from the vengeance of Jezebel; clothed with more than human power and force, seeing sights and hearing voices which are beyond the reach of men, raising the dead, multiplying the meal and the oil, ministered to by the ravens of the sky, fed in the wilderness by angels, foretelling the coming storm on Mount

Carmel, and bringing down the fire from heaven ; running before the rushing horses and chariot of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel, learning the secrets of God's presence and counsels in the caves of Horeb, and finally vanishing from earth to heaven, swept away in the chariot and horses of fire? What have we to do with him, with his terrible wildness, his terrible zeal, his terrible powers, his terrible words? His is an example which requires wise care to follow it, which is not meant to be followed in all its parts, which may mislead the careless. "Wilt thou," said the apostle to the Lord, when the Samaritan villagers would not receive them, "Wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elias did?" There was the mistaken understanding of what Elias was sent to teach us ; the mistake of thinking that all that he did was meant to warrant and sanction the like in Christians ; and that they, in times and under a dispensation utterly different from his, were to show their zeal and their faith as he did his. And then we have the rebuke which was to keep us from making any such mistakes, and wresting the lessons of the days of old against the spirit of the new gospel of Christ. "But Jesus turned, and rebuked them, saying, Ye know not of what spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." So we have a special warning, if the plain meaning and spirit of the New Testament were not enough of themselves to direct us, that we must not think that everything told us of such a man as Elijah is meant

to be understood as in itself, and under all circumstances, a perfect example for us. He was set before us not simply to copy, but as an example to think about, and use with wisdom, and with consideration of all that has passed, all that we have learned, all that has been made clear since he was sent to do God's work. But an example to us he is—who can doubt it?—he who stands with Samuel at the head of the goodly fellowship of the prophets, he who was admitted to converse with God, he who was wrapt from the earth untouched by the hand of death, he who is the figure and name of the herald of the day of Christ, he who appeared in glory with Moses, by the side of the transfigured Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration.

So strange, so different from all that is in our life, so wild and awful—yet, what was he the example of to us? What can we learn, as we read his unearthly history? Can he really teach us anything, which we in our place and measure can really copy?

Surely, if we look, he can. His fierce and consuming zeal is as far from us, as his strange and supernatural force and knowledge, or the miraculous powers with which he was clothed. But under all this he was at bottom a man, a true and holy servant of the God of truth and righteousness. At bottom, under all his strange appearance and terrible doings, Elias was, as St. James tell us, but “a man subject to like passions as we are.” And if we only look we shall see the plain lessons which his example teaches us, and how the awful scenes on Mount Carmel and Mount Horeb are full of instruction,

and encouragement, and direction, in the midst of that peaceful and orderly life in which our lot is cast.

There is the lesson of perfect trust in God. This is what first strikes us in Elijah. When everything seemed hopeless he waited without disturbing himself, sure that all would work round at last as God had promised, as suited with God's purpose. He took no thought for himself, amid the evils and dangers to which his work as God's servant exposed him. The famine came, and upon him it would be as well as upon others. But it was enough for him that God sent him to the brook Cherith, with the promise that the ravens should feed him there. "So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan." It was enough for him that God sent him to Zarephath with the promise, "Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath"; and on the faith of God's promise trusted himself to the cruse of oil and the barrel of meal. When God sent him to Ahab to announce the end of the famine, he went as boldly, with as sure a confidence in God's word and God's protection, as when he went to announce its beginning. Sure he was always that at last God must triumph. When the great cause came to be tried between God and Baal, the victory might be long in coming, but it was sure to come in the end. Every one might be on the other side, king and people; the prophets of Baal might be four hundred and fifty against the single witness for God; hour

after hour might wear away, without anything to decide the doubts and the controversy; there he sat, waiting his time, looking on unmoved and undismayed, himself against the world, so confident as to be able to mock and glory over his opponents, whom he saw already confounded and overthrown; certain of the coming proof that "God He is the Lord," certain of the coming storm though the heavens were yet without a cloud. On neither side was there sign or token, no "voice nor any that answered, or any that regarded." For the prophet of God and truth, all seems as silent and as unpromising as it could to the prophets of Baal; and there, under the silence of the sky, waited, undoubting and untroubled, the faith of Elijah over against their agony and despair.

And yet Elijah was, as St. James says, "a man of like passions with us." It was not that he was without feeling. It was not that the sight and circumstances of those evil days passed over him without even making an impression on him. There were moments, when the utter hopelessness of the fight he was making on behalf of truth and the cause of God, overcame him. "It is enough," was his cry when he requested for himself that he might die; "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." There were moments when he appealed to his Master to look upon the unequal struggle. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" spake the Voice to the fugitive, who had fled for refuge to the howling wilderness in which stood the mount of God. "And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of

hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." Never did words describe more touchingly the bitter keenness of disappointment, the utter sense of exhaustion, and of being left all alone. Yet a word of the Lord is enough to call up once more all his faith and courage, and to send him out again to fight the battle. Refreshed and strengthened by the presence of his Master on the holy mount, he goes forth as confident, and as resolute, and as sure of victory as before.

In Elijah, then, we see a man who was perfectly sure that God would in the end triumph; that goodness and righteousness and truth would at last be stronger than evil and wickedness, however strong they might seem now; who, though there seemed no human hope of things coming right, rested content in the certainty that God had a time when they would be put right. This is one thing. And so, in Elijah also, we see a man who was not afraid to be one against many, to stand alone, believing in God, among the doubting and treacherous crowds who had forsaken God, and the great company of the false prophets of Baal who proclaimed with the voice of a multitude that they had the true God among them; who was not afraid to face danger any more than unpopularity and standing by himself; who was ready to set himself in the way of the angry king, and to bring on his head the vengeance of Jezebel. All through his life that is the sight which we see; a wandering

prophet, whose home was the wilderness, in the coarse rough dress of one who did not dwell among men, worn and uncared for—"a hairy man, girt with a girdle of leather about his loins"—opposing, himself alone, a powerful king, and the corruption of a whole people; making his awful voice reach the inner chambers of the king's palace, and the secret depths of his heart; meeting him unexpectedly in the turns of the road, or sending for him with a command that could not be disobeyed—meeting him in his wrath, and in his sin; but all through, fearing no man's face, fearing no man's power, fearing no multitude nor agreement against himself. And this, not in his own cause, but because he had to be a witness to God, the good, the true, the everlasting Judge and Ruler of the world, because he had to fight the fight against sin and wickedness, because it was his work, the work which he had been sent into the world to do—to speak out, and oppose with his voice and his presence the evil which all that was great and powerful in the world was joined together to maintain.

Now is there nothing in all this which makes an appeal to our conscience? Is there nothing which says, how noble, how excellent a thing it is to have the heart and soul stayed upon God, and to be afraid of nothing for the sake of what is true and right and good? Don't we want such an example? Is it indeed needless among us? Because our condition and circumstances are so different, because we know so much more of God's will and Spirit than even the great prophet knew, has he

indeed nothing to teach us? Because it is not for us to copy him on Mount Carmel, trying God's cause against the prophets of Baal, executing God's wrath on the deceivers, foretelling God's judgments and mercies on Israel and its king; because between all this, and all that our life ever comes to, there is a great gulf fixed, can we learn no lesson from the calm certainty with which he waited, amid the impatient and unbelieving crowds, knowing how much depended on the right and the truth being proved, knowing how great was the stake at issue, yet sure that however things looked, though all for the present was against him, God's cause would prevail? Are we never in circumstances when all seems against us; and not only against us, but against the truth and the cause of Christ? Have we nothing to learn from the way in which this calm waiting and trust were joined, when the time came, with ready and bold action? Are we so brave in the cause of right, are we so free from shame for Christ's sake, does the fear of having power and numbers against us tell so little on our notions of what is right and wrong, that we don't want to be taught by the fearless boldness of Elijah?

Take away all that is strange and extraordinary in the circumstances of Elijah and the work to which he was specially called, and you will find nothing in his character but what ought also to be realized in the character of every faithful and true follower of Jesus Christ, whatever his condition, wherever he is called to work for his Master. For this let us thank God for His grace and good-

ness to us, in showing us in this bright and glorious instance, how a man of like passions as ourselves, even before the Lord had come to die on the cross for us, was able to show us the way of quietness and confidence, of assured and patient trust, of manly courage in holding by the truth, and never being ashamed or frightened out of it.

May God, who has made us know so much more than Elijah, who has spoken to us, not merely by earthquake or fire, or the still small voice, but by His Son Himself, give us grace to wait as faithfully and confidently for His truth in our generation as Elijah did in his; and to stand as boldly for His cause, and the cause of all that is holy and good, as Elijah did in the midst of unbelieving Israel.

XXVII

LOVE CASTING OUT FEAR

“ Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.”—I ST. JOHN iv. 17, 18.

FEAR hath torment, says the apostle; and the world and our life are full of fear. Wherever there is evil to be seen, *there* is fear or the seed of fear; and evil is around us, and in us, on all sides, in this world of ours. Who can look around at the state of the world at any moment, and not feel anxious at what we and our children may have to go through? Who has not things which he values as the apple of his eye, things to which he has always been accustomed, things which he believes to be bound up with all that is good and precious in life, things whose removal would make days for ever dark and unbearable—and yet does not see that they hang but on a thread; perhaps that what is to bring their ruin and overthrow has already begun to work? Who does not feel that change in the law and order of the world, and never more so than in our own days; and does not feel

that a change might easily come—in his circumstances, in his friends, in the neighbours among whom he dwells—which would make things very wretched to him? Every one who thinks and looks forward to what may be in the world, and in the country where he lives, must sometimes feel fear and anxiety coming over him, taking possession of him, and distressing him.—“What may I not live to see? What may I not live to see overthrown or set up? What calamities such as I hear of on all sides may I not have to taste of? Who can tell? To-day for one, to-morrow for the other, is the rule of fortune.” And when these thoughts come into the mind, of the judgments and trials of God’s providence meeting us, we understand what is meant by the saying that “fear hath torment.” And then there is not only the evil without us, but the evil within us—our sins and follies, our well-known weakness and the uncertainty as to what temptations, what burdens, may come across our path—we who have done so badly, and failed so often and so discreditably, who have wrought so little good in the world, and let life slip by so uselessly and vainly—what shall we do better in the time to come? What may we not fear of failing in, in the weakness of our declining years, who have failed so badly in the fulness of our strength? How shall we be safe? Who shall guard us? Who shall secure us against a dark and dismal close of life, against the blank dreary hours when all has become dead and dull to us, against going away, without courage and without comfort? There is doubtless good in the world,

but there is also evil. Who can be sure that he will have the good and keep it, and not meet the evil? When we are low, when we are vexed and have failed, in the dark still hours of the night these thoughts come upon us, and with them comes fear—fear, distress, anxiety, hopelessness, perplexity, the horror of great darkness. “And fear hath torment.”

In this fear, which haunts the life of all men—fear for themselves, fear for the changes which may make life dark to them and to those they love, fear from all things which sooner or later come on the world, and may come on us too, fear for their own end and fall at last—for this fear St. John gives us the remedy. The remedy for the fear of sin and evil is the love of God. It is no new doctrine of the apostle. It is the old song of psalmists and prophets. “I will love Thee, O Lord my strength; the Lord is my stony rock and my defence, my Saviour, my God, and my might, in whom I will trust; my buckler, the horn also of my salvation and my refuge.” “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” “The righteous shall never be moved. He will not be afraid of evil tidings, for his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord; his heart is established, and will not shrink.” Such passages are endless. But St. John adds a reason, which those who lived before the love of God in Christ Jesus was manifested to the world could not have known.

Love God, and fear not, he seems to say, for now we know to what inconceivable lengths God's love for us has gone. The crown and perfect work of our love of God is shown in this, that it enables us to look forward even to the dreadful day of judgment with courage and boldness. The terrors and sufferings which may come upon us here in our mortal life, are light and trifling compared with the horror which must fall upon all things in that closing day of doom. But even of that, the soul which loves and cleaves to God can face the thought, can wait for it with calmness and quiet. That day of wrath, to which the misgivings and forebodings of all sinful creatures look forward, as the summing up of all God's judgments—that day of terror which the Bible sets before us in fear and woe, compared with which the worst that men suffer now is little—even that day of wrath and judgment, the soul which loves God can see coming on, can pray that it may hasten, can sit still and hold itself in fearless trust and patience, as, with each hour that passes, the thick darkness and the thunder comes nearer and nearer. For why? "Because as He is, so are we in this world." Because we are here on the side of God. Because they who love God are, as God is, on the side of good, of truth, of holiness, which God must and will one day make victorious. Because that which He thinks, we, in our poor measure, think also; because what He loves and hates, we love and hate too; because what He wishes to see among men, we wish to see too. "As He is, so are we in this world";—we—those, that is, who love

God as St. John did ; and the more perfectly and thoroughly they love God, the more they are like God in their lives, in their deeds, in their thoughts, in their affections. And the side on which God is, the side which wishes for, and labours for what God counts right and good, is the side which in the end must be conqueror over all that can affright and terrify. For God must conquer at last, and overthrow all evil, and wrong, and falsehood. His triumph waits and lingers, but it must come at last. For *it* there is no real fear. The things which are really to be dreaded and feared, are to be feared only because they are the weapons, the chariot wheels of His irresistible and certain victory, before which all things that oppose and hinder it must be crushed. But they who love Him are to be fellow-conquerors with Him in His triumph. And they who are, even now on earth, "as He is," sharing His thoughts, joined with Him in His judgments, like Him in their inward souls—may have to endure for a while, as the Son of God had to endure when He was on earth. But for them fear has no place ; it does not crush and overwhelm them ; they rise out of it. For all that is to come, be it dark or be it bright, is but the road that leads onward to that everlasting victory of righteousness, which is what they long for, which would make them blessed.

Think of St. John himself, who said these words, the disciple whom Jesus loved, the disciple whose one hope and longing in the world was to see the kingdom of his Master, and to rejoice with Him in glory, whom he had loved in the bitter

day of defeat and shame. He was the disciple who felt his whole heart beat with the heart of his Master; who knew that what Jesus Christ loved, that he loved too; that what Jesus Christ worked for, he himself was ready to die for; that what Jesus Christ counted sin and abomination, *that* he himself loathed as an accursed thing. He felt that after having known Jesus Christ and His love, all that this world could offer him was not worth a thought; he lived in the mind of Jesus Christ about eternity and the things of time, and felt that all the greatness, and glory, and beauty of this world, was only that which his Master had despised and trampled on. With what thoughts of things to come would such a man live? What would he fear of sorrow, or perplexity, or loss, or pain, or death? What would the worst evils which can visit man be to him who lived in the love of Jesus Christ, on whose bosom he had leaned at supper—who was now at God's right hand? What to St. John, personally, would be all the woes and plagues which—when in the isle of Patmos he saw the vision of the future—he beheld gathering upon the world of the ungodly? He might tremble, he might pity, he might weep for others; but in the earthquake, and pestilence, and storm, and death, what fear for himself? To him the day of judgment was the day of Christ, it was the coming back and appearance of his beloved and departed Lord, the beginning of that kingdom of glory for which he daily waited and daily prayed. Awful as it was, he could have boldness when it came. He was ever abiding in Christ and His love, that, as he

says elsewhere, when his Master should appear, he might have confidence, "and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." What was there to fear in the day of God to him whose one only unmingled love was the love of God? What was there to fear in the most fearful changes and accidents of this mortal life to him who had known and believed the love of Christ? Would not the continual thought of his heart be what is said in the words of St. Paul: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

There you have "perfect love"—that perfect love which casts out fear; which stills and calms the torment which the dangers and dread prospects of our state and nature disturb and vex the soul with. What torment of this sort ever visited St. Paul or St. John? What should they fear? For all their natural fears—and St. Paul, at any rate, had plenty of them—this was the remedy and cure; they loved God above everything, they loved Him with a perfect heart. As He was, so were they in this world; of the same mind with Him, one with Him in His most perfect and holy will, whether to suffer, or whether to do or to desire. They

loved God, and felt themselves on the side which must be victorious over all evils; and so they trusted, and ran their course, and feared not. They feared not for the present though the days were evil; they feared not for the future though they knew what awaited it, and knew that they had to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.

To the end of time the saying is true. In proportion as we are as God is in this world, in proportion as we feel ourselves on His side, in proportion as we wish what He wishes, do what He approves, give up what He hates—in that proportion shall we have a shield against the fears and anxieties of which life is full. And the more entire and true our love and our obedience are, the more will our hearts be established and feel strong, and be able to look on to the awful things which are some time or other to be—which we are some time to meet—with patient and truthful calmness.

One thing only I will say in conclusion. Don't let us think that we must have perfect love *because* we do not fear. Not to fear, may come also from the thick darkness of ignorance and self-conceit, from the hardening of the heart in sin. Not to fear is no proof that our love is perfect, that our religion is accepted and blessed. Look to your love and not to your fear. See that your love is true, and sincere, and growing; see that it stands the test and trial of working life, of everyday trouble, of everyday calls; and leave it to God to soothe and cure your fears, as He will do in His good time as your love is made perfect. But don't

think to cast out fear yourself—wholesome, and godly, saving fear, sent you perhaps by God's Spirit Himself—and then go about saying to yourself in your heart, that now you are made perfect in love.

XXVIII

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.”—ST. LUKE xviii. 14.

THESE words tell us what came of the worship of two men who went up at the same time to the temple to pray; what came, as we should say, of their going to church. One went home, after he had said his prayers, in a very different state from the other. One had said his prayers to some purpose, and carried away God's blessing with him; not so the other. One went home justified; in the eyes of the Everlasting Wisdom he had answered the end for which he came to the house of God, he had done the thing that he ought to do in the right spirit, and he went away forgiven and accepted. God had weighed the other worshipper and his prayer, and had found them wanting. We are shown here, I say, the different results of doing what is outwardly the same thing; the very thing which we have just been doing here. We have come up to church as these men went up to the temple to pray; in a few minutes more we shall be going down again each to his house; and something or other must have

come of our having been to church. A judgment, one way or another, has been passed on high on the worship and prayers we have offered up. We are going away either with good from our prayers, or with no good. We have come here for a good and blessed purpose, or to no purpose at all. We are going away either justified—owned for worshippers who have prayed aright—or looked upon by God as those who have come to church in vain. Before we separate let us just think who they were, in this parable, who prayed, the one to good purpose and fruit, the other to none at all; what it was that made the great difference between them, and whether in what we read of the two we can see any likeness to what our conscience bears witness to in ourselves.

“Two men,” says our Lord, “went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.” Now let us try to put away for a moment the feelings which these two names raise in us. Pharisee is become a name of reproach among us, for a proud hypocrite, and we think with favour and tenderness of the publicans, because of our Lord’s words of mercy about them. But this is because we are familiar with the gospel story, and know what the Pharisees came to in the end. But at the time our Lord spoke the parable it was not so. Pharisee was a name of respectability if not of honour. Publican was a name which carried with it the notion of everything lawless, low, and bad. To get the full force of our Lord’s meaning we must think of the two men as they would have been thought of by the people

to whom He spoke, when they heard these words. To them it was this kind of thing. Two men went up to the temple, one a religious person, a man of seriousness, piety, and strictness, a servant of God, one who lives a holy life; the other a worldling, a careless, ignorant, disreputable wretch, whom no one in decent society would have anything to say to, without character, and without religion, belonging to a class who are mostly thieves and ruffians, blasphemers and profligates. These were the ideas which the words Pharisee and publican called up in the minds of those who heard our Lord. And thus different, they went together to the temple. The professor of religion (there is not a word said or hinted about his being insincere or a hypocrite) goes and says his prayers quietly, and like one accustomed to say them. He goes to his usual place, he collects his thoughts, he stands before God as one who has no reason to be ashamed and afraid to come before his great Master. He has nothing on his mind, nothing to weigh him down and trouble him. He thinks, and he finds nothing to be sorry for, nothing which he can wish better or different. All he can find to do is to give God thanks. He himself is satisfied. He feels nothing wrong, he is well pleased with what he believes to be God's dealings with him, and doubts not that God is well-pleased with him. He cannot help thinking how different he is from other people. The world is full of wickedness; there the Bible and experience are with him. He looks round him, and sees on all sides fraud and wrong, profligacy and scandalous

ill-behaviour, and all kinds of mean, and bad, and detestable people, filling the world with mischief and abomination—people whom it is disagreeable to think of, and disgusting to see. Thank God he can compare himself with the world in general, with the people in his own neighbourhood, and feel that he is not like them. Thank God no one can think and speak of him in the same breath with all those despisers of God's laws. Thank God there is even a satisfaction in seeing one of them before him, and feeling what a difference there is between himself and them. "God, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." I acknowledge the obligation of the law of the Lord, I am anxious to fulfil all my religious duties; I do my best to set a good example, even in what concerns the outward service of God. Thank God I am not afraid of being strict with myself. Thank God I am not only just but liberal in contributing of my means to the calls of God. Thank God no one can say of me that I neglect my duty or do it carelessly.

Most likely all that he said and felt was perfectly true; there is not a word said to the contrary in the parable. And most likely, too, when the other man spoke, the publican, who "standing afar off, would not lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner," *he* felt what was true also. Probably he felt truly enough how far he was off from God, and had good reason to feel it. For aught we

can tell his fellow-worshipper judged rightly enough of him, as far as man's judgment could go. All that we are told is that he was very penitent, very sorry, very much ashamed of himself, almost afraid to come even to ask pardon of God. I dare say he had done some very wrong things. I dare say that it was quite true what the Pharisee suspected, that he had not been much better than the set he belonged to. I dare say that he had but too good reason to be so deeply humbled, and ashamed, and contrite. But at any rate he was so. He utterly condemned and abhorred himself. His eyes were opened to the greatness and holiness of God. His shame was not put on, but was keen and piercing. He felt himself in the presence of God, miserable, naked, helpless, without excuse for what he had done; and before him rose the majesty, the long-suffering, the justice, the compassionate love of God, all sinned against by him, and all looking down on him with an awful eye, which he could not fly from, and could not meet. He must go to God, and yet how should he dare to meet Him. There was no hope but in drawing near to Him in His temple, yet he was fit only to stand afar off; and it seemed as true to him as to the Pharisee, that he was almost polluting by his tread a place only meet for saints. He bore the marks and proofs of having been a sinner upon him. As he stood there among the other worshippers he was lost to the judgment and opinion of the bystanders, lost to everything round him, in the earnestness of his grief and bitter entreaties for forgiveness. He forgot everything—who were look-

ing at him, what they would think of his words and self-accusation, in the reality of his humiliation. So that God was merciful to him he cared nothing for harsh judgments. So that God accepted his confession that he was a sinner, and forgave him his sins, people might think what they pleased of the greatness of them. He was not thinking of other people. He had not come to the temple to trouble himself about their wickedness. His own heart knew its own bitterness, and that was only too much for him. He came to be alone with God. He came to feel that there was nothing in the world to him but his sinful soul, and the God who could yet bless and save it.

Who had done God most honour? Who had done Him service in the most reasonable and acceptable way? Who went away justified—seen and owned to have been in the right in what he did? It is easy for us to answer, because we see, so to speak, behind the scenes, and we have our Lord's explanation. But if the people of that day had been watching the two men praying—the calm, orderly, decent manner of the one, answering to his character for strictness and piety, and the shame and distress of the other; his keeping afar off as if he was not accustomed to God's house, his broken words as if he did not know how to pray, his apparent feeling that he was an outcast and not fit to join with God's servants and worshippers, his plainly seeming to have on his conscience some great guilt and burden—I say, if the people of that day had been watching the two, and had had to say which they thought had come to the temple to

good purpose, which had been the acceptable worshipper, I don't think they would have said—I am not sure, if you and I had been in their place, that we should have said—that the publican was most likely the one who had gone away home “justified rather than the other.” Not the outcast publican, we might have very well thought, who seems hardly to know where he is, or what he is doing, who seems all astray and broken down in ignorant despair, who seems never to have been inside the temple before ; but the respectable Pharisee who values and understands the blessings of God's house, and of whose piety there is no reason to doubt, and who thankfully ascribes to God the glory that he is different from other men. We might have thought so ; but we have the wisdom of God to guide us, and He says, “I tell you,” little as you may think it, little as your judgment can pierce through to the real truth, “this man,” the self-accusing sinner, with his acknowledgment of guilt and his broken prayers, “this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.” For the other was one of those who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” And that made all the difference to his coming to God's house to the good of his soul or not ; all the difference to any good arising or not from his religious service. The Pharisee came to think how good he was, the publican came to be sorry for how much he wanted of goodness ; his own worthiness filled and satisfied the mind of the one, God's goodness and holiness filled the mind of the other. There was this between the two men,

the Pharisee could not help, even in his prayers, comparing himself with his neighbours, and enjoying the feeling of how much better he was than they. When he came to pray, the first thing that came into his head was his superiority to the rest of the world, and he deceived himself into thinking that he was not indulging his self-conceit and pride as long as he put it into the shape of a thanksgiving to God. But that was his fault and his folly. He was one of those who "measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." The world is indeed very wicked, and it is a thing to thank God for if we are "not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." But when we are so full of this that we forget what other sins and wrong-doings there may be besides these open sins, when we are so full of our own goodness that we forget that whatever we may have to be thankful for we have even more to be ashamed of and to be sorry for, then our thanking God, even in our prayers, for being better than other men is only one way of indulging what God hates above all things, pride and self-conceit.

It was so with the Pharisee. He forgot his sins, he forgot his weakness, he forgot his infinite smallness and worthlessness. He compared himself with men and not with God; and thinking of the sins and shortcomings of others, he utterly forgot that perhaps he might look very differently in the eyes of Almighty God and in his own eyes. This was the case with the Pharisee. The publican, whatever else he wanted, had this one thing, that he, coming into

the presence of God, felt really all the difference that there is between God's purity and goodness, and man's sinfulness. He felt, not that mankind are very wicked, not that other men are sinners, but that he himself was a sinner; a sinner standing before an all-seeing Judge, a God who trieth the reins and the heart, and who hateth iniquity. The thought of God and of his own sin left no room for other thoughts. What was it to him that other men were better or worse than himself? He had come to the temple not to measure his own goodness, but to have his sins forgiven; not to confirm his enjoyment in his own superiority, but to entreat the mercy of the great Ruler of earth and heaven. If his words were broken and imperfect, they spoke the true needs of the soul. They were the cry which a sinner should utter. They had in them the true feeling which a sinner should have, of what he must look like in the eye and judgment of God. And Jesus Christ tells us that he was right, and the other was wrong.

Now, before we go, let us ask ourselves, to which of these two have we been really most like. Have we come to church like people perfectly well satisfied with themselves, and ready, if conscience whispers that all is not right, to compare ourselves with the wicked world, or with neighbours whom we think not so good as ourselves? Remember this, that you need not be like the Pharisee in religious profession, to be like him in trusting in yourselves that you are righteous and despising others. There are many notions and standards of righteousness and goodness. The one thing

to ask is, Have you been worshipping God with the feeling that you are as good as you need be, and a great deal better than many others of your acquaintance? If that has been the feeling of your mind, then whatever you are pleased with yourself for—your religion, or your steadiness and good conduct *without* religion—you have got no good from coming here to-day. You have been secretly glorifying yourself in the sight of God, who knows how little cause we, any of us, have to glory, and what great cause we have to be ashamed of ourselves, and to beg for pardon and mercy and forbearance; and you are going away not justified in the judgment of Him by whom whosoever exalteth himself shall be at last brought low. To have come here for good, and to go away justified, you must have come and felt, and in your secret heart have spoken as the publican. In outward words you could not help speaking as he did, for the prayers of our prayer-book are all in his spirit; but did your heart go along with the words of your prayers? When you prayed God to forgive you, did you really feel that you needed forgiveness? When you confessed yourself a miserable sinner, did you at all in your heart acknowledge that you were so of a truth? When you begged for mercy, did you really desire it and hope for it? What has been really before your mind this day—the thought of God, and your own sin and weakness, or the thought of other people's faults and follies, what you dislike in them, what annoys and offends you in them, along with the pleasant comparison of yourself with them, and the remembrance that you

are not as they are? According as either of these two has been the prevailing feeling in our minds we may form some opinion as to what it has profited us to have come here to-day; we may judge with what thought the God whom we profess to fear is looking on us, as each of us goes down, justified or the contrary, to his own house.

XXIX

MAN'S DESIRE FOR GOOD

“Who will show us any good?”—PSALM iv. 6.

SURELY never were words spoken which uttered more truly and more simply the deepest cry of the heart of man. Never was so faithfully summed up the whole truth of our wants and longings. Who does not feel within himself that the Psalmist in this verse tells him what he is ever thinking of, that he knows his inmost secret and his heaviest burden? It is not the cry only of the discontented, the peevish, the murmurer. It is not the cry only of those who are unthankful to God for the goodness He bestows on them, who are never satisfied, who are always wanting change, who, wherever they are, and whatever God's goodness does for them, think that they deserve still better, and give Him no thanks. It is not the cry only of the disappointed—of those who hoped much from life and have found less than they imagined. It is not the cry only of those who are low in this world, whose portion of this life's blessings is a narrow and scanty one, who look round and see numbers richer, healthier, happier than themselves, and gloomily ask why their lot is so poor and

hard. It is not the cry only of those who have tried all that the world can give, and find it only vanity of vanities. It is the cry alike of the wise and the foolish, the weak and the strong, the prodigal and the temperate, of the honest worker and faithful steward, as well as of the waster of time and strength, the abuser of this world. When we feel that after all enjoyment there is still a want and an imperfection, we mean this. When we talk of the dulness of our life and of the scene in which our days pass, we mean this. "Who will show us any good?" It is the drawback in all pleasure, in even the highest and the best; it is the bitter penalty of an indulgence which is sin; it is the weary weight which hangs on our common days, and makes them so often look, to rich and poor alike, lifeless and tiresome and unprofitable. It is this craving, never long quiet, after some good thing which we have not. And how shall it be satisfied?

I. "Who will show us any good?" Will *they* show it us who tell us that the great thing to think of and to seek after is to enjoy ourselves, to have as much pleasure as we can, to take our ease and save ourselves trouble, to be ever reaching after some new amusement and some new indulgence? Will they show it us who would persuade us that work is dull, and excitement the only thing worth wishing for—who set before us, as the people to be envied, those who have nothing to do but to amuse and enjoy themselves, and who have their fill of the sweets and gay novelties of their day. The world is very old, and long ago

it has found out pretty well what there is to satisfy the souls of men in idleness, amusing themselves and taking their pleasure to the full. It has found out, and in thousands of ways it proclaims, in words of sorrow and bitterness, in words of warning and despair, that pleasure-seeking is "*Before*, a joy looked forward to, *behind*, a dream." And we, personally, know something about this too. We have enjoyed and have not found our heart satisfied. We have had our holiday and our day of pleasure—innocently, or sinfully employed—but whether innocently, or sinfully employed, still leaving behind the feeling that we had not all we hoped for, that there is still much that we want. We have had our wish to be idle, to be gay, to change our scene, our friends, our employments; yet still the cry was in our heart, "Who will show us any good?" The new became old, the bright became dull, the exciting became stale and flat, the sunshine faded, and the days grew dull again as before.

There is but one end to good sought in this way. It is God's gift while it lasts, and there is no sin in rejoicing in it; it was meant to cheer and gladden us like the green leaves and the beautiful flowers and the summer days; but like the green leaves and the beautiful flowers and the summer days, it passes and leaves nothing but its remembrances and its regrets behind it, it goes with the life and health and spirits of men. And they who trust in it as their good, as the best good their soul can desire, must find themselves at the end still repeating the question, "Who will show us any good?"

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2. Will *they* then show it us whose one thought is to get on in the world, and who do get on in it? Will they show it us who point to the men who have worked hard, and have overcome difficulties, and have risen by their industry, and have made great fortunes, and have become great in their time? I am not going to speak against such a life. It is, when worthily and with right thoughts carried on, an excellent and admirable one; it is the life which, in these days, it is the plain call of God's providence for many to lead. God who made men to think and to work, to strive and to rise, to fight with hardships and to rejoice in success; God who rewards the industrious and the honest with worldly wealth, and who has shown us what great and excellent things men may do with this world's wealth—God cannot be displeased at seeing men thrive and prosper in the world. But let them succeed—what then? They have done something in their day. They have gained what so many strive for. It is something, no doubt, to feel satisfaction in, when a man, by hard and good work, has raised himself, and, as we say, made his fortune; it may be a thing to admire and praise him for. Still, is that all that can be said of it? Will that success in the end satisfy all that is in the man's heart? Will it bring him all he wants? Will it save him from longing and wishing afterwards? Will it save him from finding life still dull, still disappointing, still unsatisfactory? When a man is rich and prosperous, has he then nothing more to do but to sit still and take no more trouble? Is he then safe against the wants and fears that

press down other men? Will his riches give him all he wishes for? We speak unreally and by rote about these things, and I want to speak really, if I can. I don't want to say that there is no advantage, no good in being rich, merely because it is supposed to be the right and proper thing to say so; or merely because, as everybody knows, riches have their dangers in making men greedy, hard, selfish, and forgetful of higher things—forgetful that they have a greater hope to think of than the greatest worldly success—forgetful that they are of the same race and blood as the poor—forgetful that God made them, and made them for another world. But is it not a real thing to ask, whether any man, who has got on in life, in a small way or a large, has found it answer all his hopes, has found that it has given him all he wanted, that it has taken the sting out of his unhappiness, and has left nothing for him to wish otherwise, has left nothing which still preys on his spirit and makes his heart ache? Does it save him from still confessing his secret sympathy with the cry, "Who will show us any good?"

This is while fortune and prosperity last; but can he help sometimes thinking of the end—the end appointed to all success, to all prosperity; to all great fortunes, as well as to all amusement? You must, I think, have been sometimes struck with that solemn forty-ninth Psalm, that almost sounds like a voice from the tomb, almost sounds like the warning of one who had seen with his eyes the great ones who are dead in hell, and the emptiness of all earthly day dreams. "O hear ye this, all ye people,

ponder it with your ears all ye that dwell in the world ; high and low, rich and poor, one with another. My mouth shall speak of wisdom, and my heart shall muse of understanding. . . . There be some that put their trust in their goods, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches. But no man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him ; for it cost more to redeem their souls, so that he must let that alone for ever ; yea, though he live long, and see not the grave. For he seeth that wise men also die and perish together, as well as the ignorant and foolish, and leave their riches for other. . . . Be not thou afraid though one be made rich, or if the glory of his house be increased ; for he shall carry nothing away with him when he dieth, neither shall his pomp follow him. For while he lived he counted himself an happy man ; and so long as thou doest well unto thyself men will speak good of thee. He shall follow the generation of his fathers, and shall never see light. Man, being in honour, hath no understanding, but is compared unto the beasts that perish."

Surely this is the truth of all success and all prosperity, however innocent, however well used, however sanctified. Here is its certain doom at last, not to be escaped from. And does this satisfy the longing and need of man for what is good ? Do his desires not reach beyond this ? Does he find this a full and sufficient portion ? Whether he can reach any other good or no, at least he feels the failure of this. But is there nothing of which he feels, when he has got it, that he has got something with which his heart is content and satisfied ?

Is there nothing of which the poor man may say, "Well, if I have got nothing else in the world, and can hope for nothing more, at least I have got this, and this is worth everything, and on this I can rest"—nothing, of which the rich man can say, "Well, if my enjoyment must come to an end, if I must die and leave my riches behind me, if in the grave I shall be as naked and alone, as cold and as houseless and as forgotten as the lowest of mankind, at least I have got something which I feel is my own, something which I can depend upon in spite of the uncertainty of riches, and which I shall be able to carry away with me when I die"? Is there no good thing but what is like the good things of this world; very good and blessed, perhaps, while they last, but which pass away as soon as we have got them and perish in the using, and leave us still to long for what we have not got?

There is such a thing, if we believe that we shall live again after we die, and live an everlasting life in another world when this one is over. When a man has done something which he knows and feels to be right and good, and the thing which he ought to have done, he has a kind of feeling different from any other in the world. He may have suffered from what he has done, it may have caused him loss and trouble, he may be sick, or in distress, or out of heart. Everything, as far as this world's pleasure or advantage goes may be against him; he may be misunderstood, and evil spoken of among men; yet he has a witness in his heart that he has chosen the good part which shall not be taken from him. He feels that he has done something which he can

always think of with just the same feeling as he would if it were present ; that it is a thing which stays by him and will not pass away when he dies ; a thing which nothing can make him regret or wish otherwise ; which he does not mourn over as being no longer his own to enjoy, but which he will rejoice in as long as his immortal soul can live and feel and understand ; of which the worth and happiness to him can never change or be diminished. And what is it that makes it so different from any mere earthly enjoyment or earthly gain ? It is the goodness that is in it. It is because it has something in it of that goodness which belongs in all its fulness to God, that goodness which He has made our hearts, weak and sinful as they are, to admire and feel the excellence of, even if we do not strive after it and love it for ourselves. God is good, and changes not nor passes away ; and it is when men seek after and love what is good, when they wish and try to be like God in His goodness and His love of goodness, it is then that they feel they are following after something which they will never regret or get tired of, never lose or love less than they do now ; something which, when they have got it, will fulfil the desires of their souls, instead of leaving them dissatisfied and hungry ; something which will be in real truth their very own, which nothing can take from them. Such a hope will not save them indeed from sorrow and pain, but they know they can depend upon it, as they can depend upon nothing else in this world, to be a light in their utmost darkness—to fill up the gaps and wastes of their desolate hearts, to be the thing that they

long for, that satisfies and upholds them when they have ceased to wish or hope for anything here amid the shadows of coming death.

There is much good in this world; much—blessed be God—which, though belonging only to this life, is made so as to give us infinite delight, and to afford us worthy and excellent employment. We need not talk of the bad pleasures and evil gains of this world; there are pleasures abundantly which are not bad and gains which are not evil. But after all that is of this world, the cry will still rise in our disappointed and unsatisfied hearts, “Who will show us any good?” One only can still the cry, One only can fill up the void that the best, the noblest, the most beautiful of this world’s blessings still leaves in the soul—the soul that was created to know and love its Divine Father, and has a life in it which is never to end. “Who will show us any good?” One answer only will not be found wanting, the answer of the Psalmist—“Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us.” God, and God’s goodness—Jesus Christ, and the love and likeness of Jesus Christ—these are what all human souls are seeking after; seeking blindly, if still seeking their good in sin or in worldliness—but seeking somehow, whether blindly or with a blessed knowledge of what they seek. More than all things happening as we wish in this life, more than the purest and noblest earthly gifts of God, is the light of God’s countenance to the weary and fainting soul of man. That can give gladness of a deeper and more wonderful brightness than we can ever imagine without it; that can make up for all gladness else shut out or taken

away. "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased." More precious than the corn and wine is that bright shining from heaven in the heart; more blessed is he that has it than those to whom God sends most of His treasures, beyond even corn and wine. For what man's soul cries out for is a trust as undying as itself; what he stretches forth his arms after is an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, and which enters within the veil. In the light of God's countenance man can die. "I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest: for it is Thou, Lord, only, that makest me dwell in safety." The men of this world have their portion in this life, "whose bellies Thou fillest with Thy hid treasure. They have children at their desire, and leave the rest of their substance for their babes." Grand and lofty words are they in which the Psalmist speaks of God's magnificent bounty to the men of this world. But that is not enough for the soul of man. He speaks what we all feel can alone satisfy us at last, when he concludes, "But as for me, I will behold Thy presence in righteousness; and when I awake up after Thy likeness I shall be satisfied with it." Satisfied, indeed, with that, but with nothing else. "Satisfied with nothing but with Thee, O Thou supreme, O Lord our God; most merciful, most just, most secret, most present; most beautiful, most mighty, most incomprehensible; most constant, and yet changing all things; never new and never old, and yet renewing all things; ever in action, and yet ever quiet; keeping all, yet needing nothing; creating, upholding, filling, protecting, nourishing, perfecting all things. O my

God, my life, my joy, my ever-holy dear delight." So burst forth, in days long past, St. Augustine, one of the greatest saints and teachers in the Church. So still bursts forth, and is echoed by our voices, the words of one greater even than he: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

XXX

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding.”—ST. MATTHEW xxii. 2, 3.

THIS parable, as here reported, was spoken to the Jews in one of those last public and solemn warnings by which our Lord tried to open their eyes before it was too late. In the shape of a story it is really an account of the manner in which true religion has fared in the world generally. But, in the first instance, it was meant to remind the Jews how they, for whom God had done such great things, had received the good things which He had prepared for them ; and to give them notice how, in consequence of their unthankfulness, the course of His counsels would be changed, and the blessings He had meant for them would be given to others. Others would have the chance which the Jews had thrown away ; and, alas ! others too would often prove not more thankful, not wiser, than the Jews in whose place they came, and would throw away their own chance as the Jews had done.

There cannot be any mistake as to the meaning of the story when Christ first spoke it. “The king-

dom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son." We know who the King is, and who the Son is. God rules in heaven, and His kingdom is one of love and righteousness and wisdom, in which He is for ever taking thought, and making preparation, for the good of those over whom He rules. The kingdom of heaven is the fulfilling of God's purposes to give victory to what is good, and to destroy and punish what is evil; to bring good out of evil, and to save men from the evil which they have chosen instead of the good. And part of the work and effort of this kingdom is to bring men near to God through the Redeemer: to make men one with God the Father in the person of Him who was God and Man, Jesus Christ. That is what Christ came down from heaven for; to make peace between God and man, to reconcile and set at one sinners and their heavenly King; to join men to God, not in an outward covenant only, but in heart and spirit, in will and love, in a fellowship and brotherhood which should never be broken, which should change the old into the new, the sinfulness of Adam into the holiness of Christ, which should raise the earthly to the heavenly, which should transfigure the mortal into the immortal. This was that union and reconciliation and everlasting bond which is spoken of in the parable as the marriage of the king's son. And for this was everything done which we read of in the Bible; in order that mankind, who had offended God and quarrelled with Him in Adam's fall, might be once more reconciled to Him in Christ. To prepare the way for this had all the prophets spoken, had Abraham been chosen to be

the father of an elect and peculiar people, had Moses wrought wonders for the deliverance of Israel, and received from God a law for their guidance ; for this had God been so patient with His people, and borne so long their sins and rebellions ; to this end had He so unceasingly called them back from their transgressions, rising up early and speaking to them, and sending them His messengers ; to this end that they might be sure that He meant once more to make them at one with Himself, meant to call them back from their own ways to be His people in reality and truth, meant indeed to call them to the great marriage of His Son, the reconcilment of the world with God through Jesus Christ.

And out of all the world the Jews had been chosen to know of God's great purpose. Long ago, by signs and wonders and mighty deeds, by the law and the prophets, had they been bidden to the coming wedding, long ago had He sent His servants to bid them prepare to come, because the time was drawing near. But they would not come ; they would not prepare to meet their approaching Lord in the only way in which they could do so, by leaving off their wicked ways, and listening to His counsel. At last the time came. " He sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." There we have the actual history of the gospel and its teaching. That was the time when Christ had come, and was sending His apostles to preach to His people the news that the kingdom of heaven was at hand,—that

the great day of salvation was arrived. And we know how the Jews received it; part of them with indifference, which could not be moved from the care and love of earthly things—"they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise"; part with envy and malice against their deliverer, because the light that He brought rebuked their darkness—"and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them." We know, too, how this was punished, how the Jews ceased to be God's chosen people, how the Romans came and burned their city and temple, and scattered them over all the earth. "When the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city."

"The wedding is ready"; the gospel of good tidings was in the world, the kingdom of heaven was opened to all believers; but they who were bidden were not worthy, the Jews to whom it had first been preached had rejected it, and had been themselves rejected. Then was the command given to go and preach to the Gentiles that word of eternal life which the Jews had refused; to call to the great marriage, the great reconciliation of God and the world, those who were in darkness and had never heard of His promises. "Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests." The apostles of Christ went and preached throughout all the world, without any distinction between Greek and barbarian,

bond or free. To whomsoever would they offered the water of life freely. They gathered together out of all nations one universal Church of those who wished, or professed to wish, to share in the great marriage feast ; good and bad, the hypocrite and the sincere, all were assembled in that great gathering of men to Christ. Here was what we call the conversion of the Gentiles ; the spread of the gospel through the world. Yet still, as in Jewish times, the sin of man was to spoil and disappoint the good purposes of God. Many came who were unfit to stay ; many came for the blessing, but without any desire to honour and please the giver of it. The wedding was ready, and He who made the wedding was equally ready to give the wedding garment to those who sought it. But there were those who thought they did well enough without it. In spite of all the warnings of former days, and the terrible punishment of those who had made light of the King's bounty, in spite of the free mercy which had called to the wedding those who neither deserved nor expected to be called, those who could never have dreamed of the invitation—"when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment." The wedding was dishonoured by the blot of an unworthy presence, by an insincere, a careless irreverent guest. Then the bounty which had been so free turned into wrath as terrible. "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And the history of all that the reign of God has accomplished, of all that

the kingdom of heaven has succeeded in doing, in bringing God and man together, draws from the Redeemer the awful and solemn exclamation—"Many are called, but few are chosen."

The parable, in its first meaning and application, has been fulfilled in the calling of the Jews; their refusal to listen, and their rejection; and then in the calling and conversion of the Gentiles to Christ and God, and the setting up for all nations of a universal Church of Christ. But the parable has not lost its meaning yet. It still describes the danger and the too common behaviour of those who have long known, and have often heard repeated, the call of their King in heaven to accept in earnest the good news which He sends them. It still describes how strangely and unexpectedly many, from whom least was to be hoped, end by being more in earnest in serving God than others who gave much greater promise; how the last often turn out first and the first last. And it still describes how easy, and how dangerous it is, to presume on God's long-suffering because we know He is merciful; to think that He is careless about wilful transgressions and negligences, because we know that His mercy and grace pass all account. There is warning in the parable for all those who are familiar with the thoughts and knowledge of religion. The call to come to the wedding is still sounding wherever Christians have been taught about Christ, and are still running their race amid the temptations and business of this life. We have been bidden to the wedding as much as ever the Jews were; we are receiving the summons continually—"All things are ready, come to the

marriage." And we are in great danger of turning a deaf ear to it: of making light of what we know so well and have heard so often, and of going our ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; one to his books, another to his labour; one to his business, another to his pleasure. We who observe the outward appearance of religion, who come regularly to church Sunday after Sunday; we who in our households keep up the worship and service of God; we who read the Bible and listen to its words, and take them as our law, our trust, our comfort; we, to whom it is as natural a thing to pay attention to religious thoughts and duties as it is to others to neglect them; we must remember that all this may be but the bidding—the summons and invitation to the wedding—not the coming itself. It is when our secret heart is touched by some sense that these things are not mere outward observances, but have to do with real serious truths on which life and death are hanging; when the feeling of our sins, our weaknesses, our needs comes strong upon us; when we feel that we are not inwardly what we profess to be outwardly; when conscience tells us that we are really not so much seeking to do God's will as to please ourselves; when conscience and our own spirit tell us that something more than mere listening and reading, and knowing about what is good and true, something more than mere outward show and regularity is wanted, to be truly a disciple of Christ—it is then that the call to the wedding comes, the call to bestir ourselves and be in earnest, the call to follow truth, and to be thoroughly

honest and true, in our thoughts, in our prayers, in the performance of our duty. It is then that those who have been long bidden—who have the outward knowledge of Christ's will and promise—are called to realize its truth. Come, make no delay. Show that you are in earnest in what you believe; for all things are now ready. And alas! who can help knowing, perhaps from his own experience, how often the call is made in vain, as it was when the parable was first spoken.

But again, the parable describes how unexpectedly those from whom least was hoped were in the end put before those whose advantages were the greatest. We may feel sure that it was not only then that it was so—when blind, and dark, and hopeless Gentiles were called to the place which had been forfeited by the self-righteous and rebellious Jews. We often see people round us of whom our first feeling is to say that they are beyond any hope of good; at least that they are so confirmed and fixed in habits of carelessness, and dulness to all religious thoughts and motives, that it passes our power to imagine them ever turning to more serious ways. And there are people who feel themselves so settled in bad ways that they cannot think it possible they can ever change them. They cannot muster heart even to make an attempt and try; they take for granted that the hope and comfort and thoughts of Christians are not for them. There is, indeed, nothing so difficult as to change men's ways of living and ways of thinking; and it is almost as difficult to believe that, whatever things may seem, they ever really are changed. But if

the gospel had brought no other message of comfort into the world than that of the possibility of men being really changed from bad to good, from evil ways to a conquest and victory over them, it would have brought mankind such encouragement and hope as they never had before. Numbers are kept from trying to begin to do right because they think that they are too bad to begin. Numbers think it useless to make the first step because they feel what a hold sinful, and still more careless ways have got over them. They think there is nothing for it but to remain as they are ; that it is a dream and a folly for them to think of becoming different and better. It is to them that this parable makes its appeal. Poor and maimed and blind and halt—those whose souls have no good in them but the wish that they had been different ; whose power to do what is good is maimed and weakened by a life of sin, just as the strength of the body is maimed by intemperance and vice ; they who do not see their way, who have no power to walk in the straight path—for all these, even, there is hope and room. Against not even these is there any reason why, by Christ's grace, they should not become altered and good men, serving Christ and rejoicing in His goodness. The wedding is ready for them too. He despises none. He despairs of none ; none are too low ; none are too long accustomed to evil for Him to refuse an entrance, to refuse His encouragement and help. And for all who will come in earnest and ask for it, the strength which they have not of themselves shall be given ; the good thoughts which never come into their minds now shall be put

into them ; the power to act on what they think right, which had utterly failed before old settled evil ways, shall silently grow up in their hearts—the wedding garment shall be provided.

But if the parable sets forth the freeness of God's grace, and the real hope that there is for those who, to all human appearance, have none, it also sets forth how terrible a thing it is to presume on that goodness and that hope.

For who is he who wants the wedding garment? Not he who feels the greatness of his unworthiness, the awful distance there is between him and Christ, between him and God : for then Christ would never have spoken of the maimed and blind and halt as fit for His wedding feast. Not he who, after having done his best, still feels that all that he does is the work of the unprofitable servant; who cannot satisfy himself, and has at the end to confess to himself that he strives in vain to do what he would. Not these. But the man who is careless, and self-satisfied, and pleased with himself; the man who has taken no trouble to prepare his heart for serving God and doing Him honour; the man who wishes for salvation but will not do what his Saviour calls him to do; the man who in the great work of religion blinds and deceives his own heart into thinking that God will not take notice, will be satisfied with words, will be partial and accept persons—that there may be repentance without forsaking sin, and faith without much care about right or wrong. It is the dishonest heart, the heart not whole with God, the heart of Balaam, and Saul, and Judas, of Ananias and Sapphira—the heart which embraces God's mercy and

presumes upon it—this is that want of the wedding garment which leaves the man speechless in the day of visitation, and searching, and judgment; this it is which makes him unworthy of the heavenly feast; this it is for which the outer darkness is prepared.

Hearers of Christ's gospel, you see your calling; you see in the story of this parable the likeness of God's dealings with you, and yours with Him. Whether you know it or not, as yet, you see in it the picture of yourselves, the reflection of what you are now doing, the shadow of your own fate. Bidden you have all been to the marriage of the King's Son; bidden and called at the time appointed; invited long ago, called as often as you have heard the Bible, or as often as a good thought came into your minds. And now, either you are outright refusing to come, or you have in some sort accepted the call, and have joined yourselves to the guests at the wedding. And if you have obeyed the call, either you have sought the wedding garment, which is refused to none who sincerely ask for it, or you are there without it. Either you are of the despisers and makers of excuses; of the careless, dishonest, presuming guests; or you are of the thankful and honest guests. We are reading about ourselves when we read of these different sorts; in them we see ourselves as in a figure, as in a looking-glass.

And I do not say that it is always easy to recognize ourselves, and to know to which class we belong, and to which we are most like. But our Saviour did not speak the parable for it to be an idle tale to us. Every such parable or teaching is a challenge to us to try our own selves.

We cannot be certain ; but we may have strong suspicions and misgivings that will not be quieted, or we may have humble and not empty hopes. It is not our business to fix our place as God's eye fixes it ; but it is our business to compare our lives with those measures and standards which God has put before us to try ourselves by. Hearers of Christ's gospel, of His good news of mercy, of His call to be reconciled and at one with His and your Father, to you once more is the question sent. You must know pretty well the sort of life you are leading. You must know some of the secrets which conscience tells every man about himself. And to which sort do you find yourselves most like—to the open refusers ; or to those who accepted, but did not care whether they pleased the great Master or offended Him ; or to those who accepted His call with a good will and in earnest ? Blessed are those who have the courage to ask the question, and the honesty to answer it truly. Blessed are they who all day long feel the danger of being indifferent to all God's goodness, and the still greater danger of accepting and acknowledging it with unthankful hearts. Blessed are they who see in the mercies of to-day the figure and promise of the mercies of the eternal to-morrow ; who see in the grace that is offered them now, and in God's abundant help to them to live holily and to die in hope, the assurance and pledge of His great love for them ; who see in that Holy Supper, in which our Lord invites us to join ourselves to Him and taste all the benefits of His Passion, the foretaste of that great Marriage Supper of the Lamb, in which we may be His for ever.

XXXI

THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST

“I have compassion on the multitude.”—ST. MARK viii. 2.

THE thing that must strike every one in reading of the doings of Jesus Christ, is His compassion and pitifulness for men; and particularly for men in great crowds or multitudes. He felt for men; and not merely for a few, here and there, whose wants or sorrows might specially have touched Him, but for them all. He had a fellow-feeling for each one's several distresses and several needs, how many soever the people might be, and however infinitely various their different cases, their different sorrows, their different necessities. If they were sick, He entered into and felt for each man's different shape of pain and sickness. If they were in trouble, He entered into and understood and felt for each man's and each woman's different sadness and affliction. And this not only in the case of His friends; but wherever men were before Him He immediately was touched by the feeling of their infirmities, His heart was drawn out towards them in pity for what He saw they suffered from. It was said of Him by the prophet Isaiah, “Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.” When men

were afflicted He was sorry for them ; when men were cast down and out of heart, He was moved with compassion and shared their unhappiness. And the words of the prophet are taken up and specially applied by the evangelist St. Matthew to the pity which He felt towards the bodily sufferings of the multitudes. "When the even was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with devils : and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick : that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."

These words—"I have compassion on the multitude"—were spoken in His pity for the multitudes when they were hungry and tired. They had come together to hear Him teach and to see His mighty works. They had left the cities and villages to follow Him into the waste country, and now they were without food, and too far from shops or markets to supply themselves. "In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples unto Him, and saith unto them, I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat : and if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way : for divers of them came from far." And so in His compassion He was willing to work a miracle to satisfy those men on the spot in the wilderness.

But this was only one instance of that compassion which showed itself in so many different

ways. It showed itself in His pity for their sufferings from bodily pain and disease: as when He went about "all the cities and villages, healing every sickness and every disease among the people. And they brought to Him all the sick persons that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those that were lunatic, and those that were possessed with devils, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them all." Or as we read in another place, "He stood in the plain, and the company of His disciples and a great multitude of people out of all Judæa and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases; and they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him: for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all."

His compassion showed itself in His desire to teach them; He never tired, He never was without leisure to speak to them; whether He sought the multitudes, or they sought for Him, He was ever ready with His word of warning, of instruction, of encouragement—with a parable, a sermon, an answer to questions. Wherever he saw a crowd, instantly, as it were, the desire to do them good, to enlighten their ignorance, to draw them out of the path of evil, arose in His mind. "Jesus," says St. Mark, "when He came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them many things." It mattered not where He was: He would teach them on the

mountain side, or sitting in the fisher's boat on the lake, as well as in the synagogue or in the temple. When he was rudely and roughly driven away from one place He did not lose His love and compassion for the multitudes, but He went to another: when He had done all that He could in one place He did not stay to enjoy, as it were, the fruit of His labour, in the thanks and goodwill of those whom He had done good to, but at once went forth to look for some other multitudes to bless with His presence. In one place where He had done many miracles the grateful people "sought Him, and came unto Him, and stayed Him, that He should not depart from them. And He said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent." The mere sight of those vast crowds which collected to hear and to see Him affected Him to the depths of His soul. He looked on them and His soul almost seemed to faint while He thought how much they wanted, bodily and spiritually, how much there was to be done for them, and how little could be done, how few there were to take part in His feelings and His work. "Lift up your eyes," He said to His disciples, "and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest." And again, "When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith He unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest."

It is this universal compassion and sympathy and fellow-feeling, this sharing in all the needs and pains of all who came near Him, or on whom His eyes rested, which is so striking a feature in the love of Jesus Christ. Many people have compassion for one set of troubles and afflictions, but not for another. They feel for us in the troubles of our minds, but do not care about our bodily sufferings; or they feel for us when we are in pain and sickness, but cannot understand the griefs and anxieties which press upon our minds. Many people sympathize with and have plenty of feeling for their friends or for those with whom they are connected; but it is not so common to see people who really and honestly do share the feelings of a great number of different people—people of different ways of thinking and living, of different classes and ranks, of different degrees of education and goodness, such as are brought together in a crowd. If some strange thing happens to a person in our own rank of life, whom we know and associate with, how much more keenly do we feel it and enter into it, how much more the reality of this thing comes home to us, than if it happened to some one out of our own particular class; and this whether we are rich or poor, high or low. It is very difficult to have a heart large enough to feel for all men because they *are* men, to take in all which each one feels, and to believe that every man's wants and trials are as real and important to him as our own are to us. But the heart of Jesus Christ was large enough for us all, and His compassion reached from high to low, in the mingled crowds which gathered round Him. Only think of the wonderful variety and difference which

there is in any crowd that you may happen to see collected. Think how each man in that crowd, however large it may be, has his own separate soul, different in everything from every one else's, just as his own face is different. Think how each one has grown up from childhood, in circumstances entirely different from every one else, what different sights he has seen, what different words he has heard, what different things have happened to him and marked his life; and what a different story each would have to tell if each one were to tell it us of what each had gone through in his life. Think how each has a different set of troubles and vexations from all the rest; how each has a different set of dangers both to his bodily health and to his soul's good; how each thinks his own sorrows heavier to bear than any one else's. Think how each has his own particular wish and desire, which seem to him more worth having than anything else that other people care and strive for. Think how each has his special temptations; how each has differently struggled against or yielded to his temptations; how each has a different set of sins on his soul to answer for at the day of judgment, and requiring to be forgiven and taken away before the day of judgment comes. Think of that the next time you see a crowd of persons collected together, for business or amusement, for worship, for sight-seeing, for a market. Or think of all of us here in this parish, small as it is; of all the differences of our ways of life; of things that have happened to us during all the years from our childhood, of all that has been given us to do, of what we wish, of what we suffer from, of our afflictions, our bereavements,

our sicknesses, our secret troubles. How infinitely different are the circumstances of each life, and how it seems as if a person who understood some of them could not easily feel for the opposite ones; as if he who cared and thought much of the things that interest one set of people could not care much for what interests another. And yet, when we come to think about it, and see things as they are, what a subject of compassion is a large collection of people, a crowd, a multitude. If we only recollect that each person's wants and sorrows are as real as our own—that he feels them as deeply for himself as each one of us really feels his own burden—what a collection of sorrows, of wants, of burdens do we see before our eyes. They are opened to behold something of the great mass of suffering under which mankind labours, and to relieve which Jesus Christ came on earth. If our own sorrows and wants are so great—if we can also understand something at least of the sorrows and wants of our friends, and can in part share their feelings under them—then look at each face in the crowd, call up each name in the village; and, remembering how each has a heart that feels, a soul that needs help and faints in trial—remembering this, add up together in your thoughts all this great sum of failure, trouble, necessity, sickness, and disappointment, and see if it does not make up a mass which may well make us sad and serious. It was this which was ever present to the mind of Christ when He looked on the multitudes. He had no thought for self as we have. Our care and compassion for ourselves are apt to swallow up all other

cares, and leave no room for compassion for our brethren. But with Him all the cares of each smallest person in the multitude were clearly beheld and felt in His heart. He saw and felt for all, as we may perhaps feel now and then for some one whom we love very much, or who has suffered some extraordinary trouble. He who knows the hearts of all men looked into the heart of each one in the crowd, saw what vexed and troubled him, saw where he had gone wrong and failed, saw what was his besetting sin ; and not only saw, but felt as we should do if we saw the sin and danger of a favourite child. What would seem to us but a collection of faces to be forgotten for ever the next moment, was to Him a collection of souls, each running his race of life or death, each with a treasure to lose or save, which to Him was worth all the world ; each deserving the deepest interest and fellow-feeling in his difficulties that man can give to man. Thus was it that our Lord looked on the multitudes. He never turned away from them, He never was tired out and disgusted by them, He was always eager to do them what good He could ; because in the crowd no one was lost or hidden to Him, but the necessities of each were felt as if each one stood by himself ; while, at the same time, being all brought together, the wants of those great multitudes appealed so much the stronger to His compassion.

Nor has He ceased to feel for men's wants and helplessness. As He looked on the multitudes of old, so now He looks on the multitudes of the world from His heavenly throne. He embraces them all in His mercy. He knows each man's

need, as if each man were the only object of His care. He pities the crowds whom even we pity, who know not their right hand from their left, and who wander all their days in darkness and without comfort. And He marks and takes account of the endless differences which make each man's lot in life what it is, either in joy or sorrow, health or sickness, whether by temptations from without or temptations from within. "For we have not an high priest," says the apostle, in one of the most merciful and encouraging texts in the Bible, "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Let us then, in our times of helplessness and distress, remember Who it was who used to look with such compassion on the sick and fainting, on the wandering and ignorant multitudes; and trust that His compassionate eye is on us too. And let us, towards our brethren, try to catch something of His Spirit. Let us not be shut up in ourselves; let us learn to feel for others, to believe that when they speak of their sufferings, those sufferings really are as great to them as ours are to ourselves, and that however outwardly different we may be one from another, we are not so different in the way in which we endure temptation and smart under distress. So shall we learn to be kinder to one another in feeling and in thought; to have a more real and living wish to help one another, not by actual assistance only, but by the inestimable help of a kind word and a kind look, a simple mark of sympathy and fellow-feeling, which

in the hour of need and sorrow is often of more value than anything else that man can do for man. So shall we learn more and more the way to fulfil our Master's command given us by His apostle: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ"—that law of Christ which governed His own life, that law which He lays on His disciples. The more we are able to sympathize with and feel for others—the more we are able to enter into the wishes and wants and feelings of our brethren, however different from our own—the more we desire that in all that is good and right, in all where they want relief and kindly help, our hearts may be able to go with their hearts—the more we are able to do all this, the more like shall we be to our Father in heaven, of Whom it is said, "His compassions fail not. They are new every morning"; the more like shall we be to that Saviour and Lover and Healer of men's souls, who could not look upon a multitude without having compassion on them, and seeking to do them good.

XXXII

EARTHLY WORK AND HEAVENLY PREPARATION

"For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."—ST. MATTHEW xxiv. 38, 39.

I SHOULD think that the first thing that must come into our minds whenever we hear this text, is what an exact description it is of the sort of days we live in. At least so it must seem, when we hear it and think of what it says; when we try to break through the old familiar sound of the words we have so often heard—try to hear them as if we had never heard them before—try to make the real meaning of the words break in all their force on our hearts and minds. It is a picture of how the ungodly and the careless were employed when the wrath of God surprised them, and cut them off in their sins. "As in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away." So

also "in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all." That is our Lord's description of those ungodly days, running on without knowing it to the very brink of destruction. And He brings it in to compare with them the days before His own second Advent. The last days, just before He returns, will, He says, be days of carelessness like those early days of sin.

And yet, as I said before, that which He fixes on in those days before the flood, to bring home to our minds the idea of their being sunk in worldliness and ungodliness, is what might just as truly be said of the times that are passing over us now, and in which we all of us are taking a part, more or less busy. The words He uses describe the common course of everyday life, everyday arrangements, everyday work. We are providing our daily bread and enjoying it. The old are thinking of settling their children; the young are starting in life, and making new homes for themselves. We are eating and drinking, we are marrying and giving in marriage; we are buying and selling; we are planting and building. We don't think that we are doing anything very extraordinary, anything very wrong, in following these the ordinary occupations of men. Yet what is the difference between what truly describes our way of going on, and that which Christ sets forth as the manner of life in the sinners before the flood? Is it not startling to find that the same

words suit us both—that there need not be a syllable changed, in order to apply to the present state of the world the terms in which our Lord holds up in warning the most awful examples of the blindness of sin rushing on headlong to its doom?

Some have been so startled that they have thought that the only way to escape was to be as unlike as they could in their outward life to this picture. They have taken it to mean that there was no safety for the Christian soul, except by absolutely leaving the world. They have read in it a warning from the Lord against having anything to do with the course of this world, its interests, its ties, its amusements, its business. They have supposed that He meant that a Christian's duties and hopes could not be reconciled with giving thought and time to what belongs only to this present life: to those things which, undoubtedly, tempt so many now, as they have tempted men in all ages, to forget God and their souls, and to think only of the cares and pleasures of this world. They have seen in it a call to come out of this world's ordinary engagements; to have nothing to do with marrying and giving in marriage, with buying and selling, with planting and building. It is less surprising that they have so understood the text, than that we should hear it, as we so often do, without being moved by it at all.

But were they right in so understanding it? Were they right in supposing that the only way of preparing for the Saviour's coming was to separate themselves from the common course of human life, and to give themselves up altogether to the thoughts

and anticipations of the future? St. Paul plainly teaches us—No. Of course, individuals may have had such a call to devote themselves so entirely to God's work, as to have no more business or concern with home or family or earthly pursuits. But for the mass and generality of Christian people the case is different. They are not called from their worldly place or business. They are not meant to prepare for Christ's coming by forsaking it. They are to wait for Christ, not withdrawn from the ordinary tasks of human life and society, but, while they wait, fulfilling them diligently. They are to "study to be quiet," and to provide for their families; husbands are to love their wives and wives their husbands, children are to honour their parents, and parents to take care of their children; they are to be "not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." The New Testament makes it plain that, as far as outward life, outward duties, outward business, are concerned, the gospel was not to make any change in the old accustomed course of life. There was still to be marrying and giving in marriage, still to be buying and selling, and planting and building; there were still to be those conditions under which, from the beginning, God had appointed that man should pass his time, and carry on the state of the world, and exercise those talents and gifts which had been given him that he might find so much of his pleasure and comfort in them here.

On the one hand, then, we have the certainty that Christians were meant, under the gospel, and while preparing for Christ and heaven, to take their parts in the ordinary business of life, and not to

think to please God by withdrawing from it. On the other hand, we have our Lord Himself using just such a description as suits the life which men in general lead—not a life of plain sin, but of the natural, and, as we all think it, the innocent, lawful, right occupation which belongs to the present state of things—using such a description to mark the worst and most awful times of wickedness and its punishment. The flood was ushered in by a time of eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. What brought the fire of heaven on Sodom is spoken of as a time of that which we see all round us, and which we are all engaged in—a time of buying and selling, planting and building. If these things are so full of evil and sin, how does the gospel allow us to go on in them? If, on the contrary, God meant men to be engaged in these things until Christ comes back again, why does our Lord seem to condemn them;—why does He choose them, out of all the things that went on in the days of the flood and of Sodom, to mark those days by? Why does He hold them up, as days of eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, planting and building, as if their very sin consisted in these things?

These things are not evil in themselves. So far from being evil, they are, in one shape or another, to most of us, that in which our main duty lies on this earth. In them it has pleased God that we should, most of us, be trained and prepared for His kingdom in heaven. It seems almost strange that so it should be, though so it is. For I think it must strike us sometimes, how great is the difference between

what we are doing here, and the life which we look forward to hereafter; what a gulf there is between the worldly employments, which take up our thoughts and try our utmost strength here, and those heavenly and eternal things with which alone we expect to have to do in the world to come. If this life is, as we believe, a place where we are being prepared and made fit for the life of glory, how strange at first does the preparation seem! What can the things which take up our time here—our family cares and our work and all that we have learnt to do in the way of our business after great efforts and long time; the days that we have spent in labour, the skill that we have at last gained, the knowledge that may have cost us so much toil—what can all this have to do in making us fit for a life where it shall all be left behind and forgotten, and where everything will be so unlike this life? Yet so it is that God has appointed the things of this life to be the field in which we are to grow up, furnished and made meet to become citizens of a heavenly country. We can see in part how this is, and in part we cannot see. We can see that in these things men's hearts are proved that it may be shown what is in them. In these things come, thick and continually, those trials of faith, of truth, of patience, of trust in God, of love to our brethren, of kindness, of temper, of straightforwardness, of purity, of power over our secret thoughts and desires, of selfishness and unselfishness—in which, whoever conquers is, each time that he conquers, so much stronger in soul, so much more like his Master Christ, so much fitter to be with Him above. The servant who does his duty as to the

Lord and not to men, not with eye-service or carelessness, but as under the eye of his Master in heaven, is practising and learning the faith and fear of God in the everyday trifles and small tasks of His service. The worker who does whatever his hand finds to do with his might, who does his best because he feels that it is God who has given him his work to do, is, whatever be his employment, serving and pleasing God. In such cases we can plainly see how men are learning, in mere earthly things, to be true servants to God in heaven ; how they are, as it were, practising in small things the lessons which He will call them to apply some day in greater things ; how they are now being faithful in a little, and so—while fitting themselves for higher callings and a more lasting service—learning to be faithful in much.

So much we can see ; but there is much that we cannot see, as to the reason why God has been pleased to make us employ our time and thought with things only of this world, as a preparation for that very different world which is to be our eternal home. But the fact is plain. It is not by going out of the world that we are to serve God. It is not by throwing up the worldly ties and employments in which we find ourselves that we are to get ready for the Advent of our Master. These ties and these employments are our proper field of service. In them, not out of them, we must learn to love and to please Him. In them our hearts must learn to rise up from earth to heaven. In them He proves us. In them we must conquer our besetting

sins. In them we must glorify our Master's name.

But as we may succeed in this trial, so we may fail in it. As we may use these earthly things as steps towards higher and heavenly things, so we may make them clogs and chains around our hearts to keep us from our heavenly calling. As we may make them, what God meant us to make them, a field for the deepening and widening service of God, so we may make them our idols. We are meant to think a great deal about them. But we may come to think of nothing but them. We may come to empty them of all faith in God, all hope of higher blessings, all wish for the promises which God has shown us beyond them. Eating and drinking without fear and without restraint, we may come to do so without thankfulness to the Giver—with the bare fleshly appetites of brute beasts, which know no better. Marrying and giving in marriage, we may let our whole souls be taken up with the cares of our families—how to get them on in life, how to secure for ourselves all that we can of comfort and riches. Buying and selling, we may come to leave no corner even in our souls for God, from the affairs of our trade and merchandise, no moments for prayer, no taste for silent communion with God, no power to turn away our thoughts, even for a few minutes, from the bargains and the schemes, from the rivalries and risks of present business, to what is to be our fate hereafter for ever. Building and planting, we may build and plant as if we were doing so for ever ; as if there was nothing for a man to think of, nothing worthy of his

pursuit, but to make himself a name, and leave his mark and memorial among men, and busy himself with making such changes as he can in this perishing and passing world, in which he is spending his few years on his way to death. This is easy; alas, how easy! How common, how easy is it to turn what God has placed us in, that we may practise and rehearse our parts for the everlasting scene, into the entire end and hope and desire of our lives. How easy to forget all that sanctifies, exalts, purifies, blesses, makes safe the affections and interests, the busy employments of this life—and to sink them down to nothing more than what the mere worldling sees in them. How ready are we to turn the wholesome discipline of earnest and real work into an all-absorbing pursuit of gain; how ready to find in earthly ties which God has hallowed, an excuse for forgetting Him, neglecting His calls, and devoting our whole heart to what makes our pleasure and comfort here; how ready to twist the truth that God has given us work and duties and pleasures here, into the fatal delusion that, while attending to them, we may shut our eyes to the words of Christ, and the choice between eternal life or eternal death.

It is not mere buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, which make the danger and sin of those times of which our Lord warns us. They are in themselves but the necessary part of human life under any circumstances. It is where men think of nothing else besides eating and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, planting and building; it is where buying and selling make men forget that they have a God and Redeemer, that

they are immortal souls, that the greater part of their real life is yet to come after this life is run through, that the danger lies. It is when eating and drinking, buying and selling make men shrink from the thoughts which the Bible sets before them, make them afraid of fairly facing the question of what they are and of what they ought to be and to do for God, and afraid of meeting God and having to do with Him, that Christ's words are so full of warning. The sinners before the Flood were not sinners because they followed the ordinary pursuits of human life: they were sinners because their eating and drinking, their marrying and giving in marriage, hardened their hearts against God; because in the midst of it they rebelled against Him, and so turned the ordinary course of life into a curse and a pollution. The men of Sodom were not condemned because they bought and sold, and planted and builded; but because, sunk and debased in their sins, they went on blindly as if the common order of the world were to last for ever, and they were to go on doing as they had ever done, without interruption or punishment, in spite of their sins.

And our days will be like theirs—our days will be like those perilous times which are to come before our Lord's return—so far as we go on following, without faith and the fear of God, our worldly affairs; so far as we let this world take such a place in our hearts that it shuts out the other, and makes us blind to the certainty of God's judgments, and deaf to the calls of His grace.

Is the world such to us that it is keeping us from really trying to prepare ourselves for our Master's

Advent? Are we eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, planting and building, with the hard, proud, reckless, dull ungodliness of the men before the Flood? Are we so full of these things that we have not time to think of anything else? Do they make us afraid to face the thought of leaving them behind us, and going to a world where men no longer buy and sell, where they no more marry or are given in marriage? Christ's words ought to sound very awful to us if anything like this can be said of us. For then these things are but the thin blind and veil that they were to the men before the Flood, between us and the destruction that is swiftly and silently drawing near. They but hide from carelessness and ungodliness what must be its doom.

Let us ask ourselves in real earnest whether, lawful and necessary as these things are, they may not be taking up room in our souls that belongs to the thought of God. We can tell whether they are doing what God meant them to do and preparing us for better things; or whether we love and follow them for their own sake and for nothing else. One test among many is very plain: do they keep us from what we know we ought to do; do they take up time that we know belongs to the service of God; do they keep us from prayer and from learning God's will; do they serve as an excuse for the real dislike which we have to greater seriousness and self-denial? Do they keep us from coming to God's Holy Table; are we so busy with them that we have no time to prepare for it? Do they try our tempers so much, and fill us with such uncomfortable feelings, that we fancy we

have an excuse for not coming? They are truly standing between us and God if this is so. They are truly keeping us from preparing to meet our Judge. How shall we dare face Him on His throne of judgment, when here we dare not face Him on His throne of grace, on the mercy-seat where the sinner is called to pardon, the dead to life? Christ's return must be indeed an awful thought—it ought to be a most awful one—to those who have to confess that, amid the cares and toils and pleasures of life, they have no time to think of this. For it is confessing that the world has got such a hold on them, as it had got on those easy-going and reckless sinners, whose defiance God answered by the Flood and the fiery rain of Sodom. O let us think of what we all pray for, what we have so often prayed for—"Thy kingdom come"; the kingdom of God and Christ. We cannot cease to pray for it unless we cease to be Christians. Yet what a prayer is it for those who are not prepared for its coming, who are afraid to prepare for it! Nor can we keep it off or keep it back by ceasing to pray for it ourselves; in its time it will come, and other prayers, if not ours, are hastening its coming. There is but one way to prepare for it—to let the thought of Christ's coming mingle with all our earthly life and thoughts and interests; to remember in all our buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, *Whose* we are, and where we are going, and what we are called to be. There is but one way—to take care, by prayer and the continual recollection of God, that the thought of our Master's kingdom and Advent should be no stranger even to our hours of busiest employment or

most hearty joyfulness ; that so, living in His faith and fear continually, He may not surprise us, even if He should come back and call us in the very midst of our buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage ; that He may not surprise us even if He came in the very hour when hand or brain are fullest of our earthly work, or in the very moment of our freest and most unsuspecting mirth.

XXXIII

CHRISTIAN JOY

“And your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”—ST. JOHN xvi. 22.

THERE can be no doubt that Christ meant this promise for all who believed in His name. And there can be as little doubt that He is as able now, as He ever was, to fulfil His promise to the uttermost. That is to say, the life of a Christian was to be a life lit up by a joy which nothing earthly, no power, or malice, or hatred of man, could take away. It was to be a life of gladness and brightness, and all that we mean by rejoicing. It is not said that it was not to be a life of troubles and crosses. But what *is* said is, that whether there were troubles and crosses or no, there was certainly to be a joy which should last through them all, and in spite of them all. The promise was made first to Christ's apostles. How do we find it fulfilled in them? What sort of language is theirs about the feelings which governed their life? Did they think that their Master had promised more than it was possible for them to have? Or did they manifestly show, by their way of speaking, that *they* had found a Christian life a life of gladness of

heart, of freeness of spirit, of joy and brightness and cheerfulness of soul?

I might appeal to the whole language of their letters and addresses. Could men have written with the eagerness, the triumphant confidence, the faith and interest never failing, never getting tired, which we find in the Acts and Epistles of Christ's apostles, unless they were full of that cheerfulness, and freshness, and gladness of heart, which alone can keep up men's spirits in some difficult and dangerous work? No men could have done and spoken as they did, who, whatever they might have to go through, were not all the while rejoicing in what they were doing, and carrying in their hearts a secret and abiding joy, which rose above all troubles and vexations round them.

Then, just remember the continual expressions in their writings, which show that their hearts were full to overflowing with that joy which their Master had promised. Remember how they are continually telling their brethren and disciples that joy and gladness are as much parts of true and real religion as faith and obedience. Thus St. Peter, writing to persons in great trials and dangers, yet doubts not that for all that, they are full of rejoicing. You are under the hand and protection of God, he writes, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." And though ye have not seen Jesus Christ yet ye love Him; in "whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." So is it with St. Paul: "sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing,"

is his description of himself. "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you." Standing by faith, he writes, in the grace of God, we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also." "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." It is his repeated call. "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice."

We see then how completely Christ's words came true in the case of the first Christians. And we cannot doubt that the words were meant for all who should believe through their means. Joy was meant to be the Christian's portion; joy was made from the first a mark and feature of the mind of Christ. Nothing was to quench it or beat it down, of all the hard and evil things which might meet the Christian. It was to light him through the wilderness. In the midst of the storm and the darkness he was still to be bright and glad of heart. His spirit was to be fresh and free. He was still to go on his way rejoicing.

Is this so among us? Are our hearts so full of liberty, so able to cast off the burdens of the present life, and to strengthen themselves in holy gladness against the sorrows and the weariness of our days? Is the rejoicing spirit of the early days of our faith the companion of our own? Can we fairly and honestly, and without putting a force on words, take the language of St. Peter and St. Paul as our own? When the apostle cries out to us, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice," do our souls answer the call with the inward knowledge, Yea, we do rejoice; we have the cheerfulness and gladness which the Lord

promised ; we feel that we have reason to rejoice and be glad in what has been done for us, in the joy and gladness which brightens our spirit, and helps us cheerfully to run our appointed race. Is this so with us ?

Of course, people's natures and characters are very different ; and joy and cheerfulness are much more natural to some than to others. Yet it is true that the Bible certainly speaks of a lightness and gladness of spirit, as something of course belonging to a Christian ; and it seems not to be understood how any one can really be a Christian, and believe what a Christian believes, without his due portion of devout and thankful gladness, spread through his whole life. If then we find that we want it ; that we cannot understand what it is to be, in a sense, always rejoicing, always with a free and glad spirit and temper, and able to sympathize with the tone of brightness and hope which runs through the words of psalmists and apostles, in spite of all their fears and troubles, I think it shows that there must be something wanting in our religion. We are meant to rejoice—to be able to do so even when most cast down. If we find that joy is a stranger to our souls, that our hearts refuse to rise up in cheerfulness and gladness, there must be some mistake in our way of being religious.

It is a large subject, and I will only say two things about it now.

1. It is of no use hoping or thinking to rejoice, as Christ promised that His disciples should rejoice, unless our conscience is honestly clear of wilful or continued transgressions. Unless we can bear the

light of God's truth upon our heart, we cannot expect the blessing of the free and happy spirit of joy. Clinging to our sins, and knowing that we are unfaithful to our own convictions, is enough to darken any man's mind. Letting our heart still be overrun with bitterness and uncharitableness, or giving it over for a prey to selfishness and idle neglect of duty, will keep joy from any man's spirit. He may laugh, but he will not have that joy that no man taketh from him. He may be merry, and thoughtless of care and sorrow; but that quiet steady light from heaven, which not even sorrow and suffering can dim, will not go with him all his days, and brighten his common and dullest hours. For a man to rejoice with the joy which Christ gives, he must not be secretly in league with Christ's enemies; he must not be doing what he knows that Christ died to bear the curse of, what Christ died to redeem the world from.

2. And another thing to be said about the joy and gladness spoken of by Christ is this: it is not a thing to be forced, to be got and put on, by saying to ourselves that we will do as we read in the Bible that Christians ought to do—that we will, by stirring ourselves up, by choosing to do so, bring forth Christian joy in our souls. I am afraid that there are people who deceive themselves with thinking that something of this sort is possible; that they can, by trying, force themselves into feeling joy and rapture—a joy and rapture which is the same as Christ meant, and as St. Paul felt and spoke of. You might as well stick a full-blown flower into the ground, and expect that

it would make itself at once a root there and grow. It is beginning at the wrong end. We cannot make ourselves glad about anything by choosing to be glad. There is nothing so dreary and dismal as forced joy and gladness; if joy does not rise of itself out of the inner depths of the heart, it is no real rejoicing at all, but only a hollow and melancholy mask of it, making all men know, who have eyes to see, that it is not really there. If we would really have this joy which Christ speaks of, we must not think of playing tricks with ourselves, and try to work ourselves up to think we have it when we have it not. Better be honest, and own that we want it, than deceive ourselves with our feelings and imaginations. It is not ours to seize upon. It is not ours to make for ourselves. Listen to His words: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." It is Christ who gives it. It is from Him that it must come. It is to Him that we must go in order to have it. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." "My joy"—it is Christ's; it is He in whose hands are those treasures of light and joy, and freedom of heart. He holds them to give them to us, that "our joy might be full." But it is He alone who spreads them abroad by His Spirit in the spirit of man; and we must bide His time, and follow His way, if we would really share in the blessing which He has promised.

Christ's way is a plain one; it is the way of faith,

of obedience, of faithful duty, of true and honest resistance to temptation and sin. "If a man love Me," He said, "he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him." And where Christ and the Father come, there, too, must come a brightness from the Father's dwelling-place; there must come peace, and gladness of heart, and enduring liberty. But it was only so that these gifts came to St. Paul and St. Peter. "If a man love Me, he will keep My words." There is the way of peace and gladness. There is no other road to them but that.

One thing only let us remember. We cannot make to ourselves joy and thankfulness; that must be God's doing, working secretly in our souls. But we may, by our foolishness, keep them at a distance, and even shut them out when they would enter in. We may weakly, foolishly, unthankfully, love the gloom; love the dark, and the melancholy, and the hopeless side of things rather than the light. We may tease and vex ourselves needlessly, and refuse to be comforted; we may refuse to have our days made brighter, we may refuse to be cheerful and hopeful, or part with our burden of dark and heavy thoughts. Let us be on our guard against this, which is a very common, a very sad temptation to many minds, who know themselves to be in earnest, who know themselves to be not triflers, and who yet put away with their own hands the happiness which God appoints them and weaken their power for doing the work to which God calls them. We cannot, indeed, at

pleasure make joy and gladness in our hearts. But we may, if we will, keep down gloomy and hopeless thoughts. We may rouse ourselves from the sickly dreams of hopeless despair. We may run away from them to the remembrance of the love of Jesus Christ, the out-pouring of His words of comfort and sympathy, the life laid down in love for us, the grave and death vanquished for our sakes. This we can do. If we cannot yet rejoice, we can help ourselves from dwelling on our favourite and familiar subjects of complaint. We can turn away from the temptation of refusing to be comforted, from the temptation of liking to feel ourselves forlorn. Joy and gladness were as much meant for the most down-hearted among us as they were for those heart-broken followers who thought that they saw all their hopes buried in the grave of Jesus Christ. If we can only trust Him who was raised again, there is no promise which He made and fulfilled to them, of comfort and enlightenment, and abiding unshaken joy, which we may not hope in due time to find realized in our own experience of life.

XXXIV

THE REST OF OLD AGE

“But go thou thy way till the end be : for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”—DANIEL xii. 13.

WE have been reading to-day about the prophet Daniel. We have heard how he was tried and how he conquered. And the text tells us how he was rewarded. He was one of the favoured ones under the Old Testament dispensation. Like Enoch who walked with God and was not found, for God took him ; like Elijah who went up in the chariot of fire to heaven ; like Moses whom God buried, and no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day ; like Job who found the latter end of the Lord to be mercy ;—so Daniel was one of those few who had their special reward assigned them at the end of life. Of other saints we read chiefly of the great things God did for them in their lives. Our eyes are fixed on their lives, and on what they did, on what they went through, on what they were saved from. Abraham, and Samuel, and David, and the other prophets, we think of as in the midst of trial, or in the thick of life ; we do not turn our thoughts much towards their end or to what accompanied it. But of Daniel there is nothing that we read about in his life

which is so striking as what belonged to its close. He had, no doubt, a most remarkable life. He, as much as any, had gone through strange changes; he had been a proof of the strength of faith, and of the power of God to protect and reward it. To him had been shown, in awful mixture of clearness and mystery, the things that were to be on the earth after him. He was most remarkable as a witness to the truth—remarkable as a prophet, remarkable as a living saint of God. But all these things he shares, more or less, with others. The thing which he has alone, the thing that will always come upon the readers of his awful book with the most solemn force, is the promise made to him individually with which it ends—the clear promise of rest beyond the grave. Daniel was one to whom it was given without any uncertainty to know what was to become of him when this world was over. He is marked out among his fellow-servants in the company of the prophets by the privilege of his death. The light of the other world shines on him while he is yet in this. He knows, before he goes, while death is yet at a distance, that he is to “stand in his lot at the end of the days.” He is one to whom death seems scarcely death, so surely does he still live beyond it.

I don't mean that Daniel was the only one of the Old Testament prophets and saints whose eyes were opened to see into the life to come. But he is the only one of whom the special favour is recorded, that he was bidden to rest and wait, in the assurance that his trial was over while still on earth; that his lot was sealed for endless life. He is the only one of whom we are clearly told, that even here he was

permitted to see his name written for ever in the book of life. He was to go his way till the end came, and to rest and wait. Thus God closed His dealings with His servant here, till the due time arrived for what was to follow—what was to show the end of all that had been here begun, the fulfilment of all that had been here promised. Meanwhile, after a life of many trials, exercised not by trials only, but by the overwhelming and awful disclosures of God's ways and judgments, Daniel was to rest and wait, with the light of eternal life clear in the sky before him. His work was done; and now before the reward came, there came, while he waited, the foretaste of it. Much was to be, as men count what is much, before he could stand in his lot at the end of the days. Many days, many ages must pass before that. All that vast train of things to come, which he had seen in a vision, had first to be fulfilled. Changes of the most wonderful kind were to pass over the earth and its inhabitants; nations were to rise and pass away; men's strength was to be proved to the uttermost; they were to do things that their fathers never dreamt of, and yet to find out ever more and more both their weakness, and what they had yet to do; trouble and distress were to swell into greater storms age after age, and the world was to go through new trials, and to be tormented with fresh fears and fresh difficulties as it grew older and seemed to grow wiser. But what was all this to him? In the midst of the wild confusion his place was secure. He looked on it all coming, and knew that it could not touch him: for he was to go his way, he had

fulfilled his task; he was henceforth but to wait and rest.

He passed away, and all came as it had been foretold. But what was it now to him? What was it to him if kings fought and destroyed one another; if nations in their madness overthrew the state of the world; if time after time there came again the distress of nations with perplexity, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking for those things that were coming on the earth? He was at rest and waiting. He was safe, and no more to be troubled by them. Till the end came—till the lot was ready for him—till the tale of the elect was full—it was all one long rest, one long calm blessed rest; a rest on this side of the grave for a while, a longer and more peaceful, more blissful rest on the other. But on this side as on that, a rest from labour, a rest from the fear of evil, with the clear view—never clouded though not yet near, distant yet certain—of the victory of God, of the light of heaven on the everlasting hills, where, at last, he was to stand in his lot in the end of the days.

And what is this special privilege of the prophet Daniel under the old dispensation, but that which, under the gospel, has become the fit and natural close of a Christian life; that which it naturally leads to; that which we may—if we are in earnest—humbly in our measure look forward to; a blessing which is not now confined to one or two of God's most favoured servants, but which might be the comfort of everyone whose life is spared to its natural limits. And it is in truth the blessing of numbers who have been obedient to His call, and have

trusted His word, and done His work. "Go thou thy way till the end be" seems God's word to the Christian soul, when the evening of life is come, and the light is failing, and the night closing in. Go thy way now, rest, wait, and look on to what is to be. Rest, and do not trouble any longer about the whirl and bustle of this mortal life, in which thy part is done; about what is wrong in it, which is no longer for thee to put right; about what is troublesome in it, which is not long for thee to suffer from. Rest, and let it go on—storm and sunshine, gay or sad—it cannot touch thee, it cannot tempt thee, it cannot help thee much more. Rest and be at peace, and leave it to Him who orders it all, and to those who are called in thy room to fight their battles in it, to stand their trial, to do their allotted portion of good. Whatever thou couldst have done, all is over now, thou canst do no more; thou canst but hope that it was not all work thrown away. It is beyond all mending and making up for now. So rest and trust. Rest and be calm. Rest and look back, and take account of what is gone; and give thyself time to feel and measure better the love wherewith God has loved thee, and the bonds and ties which ought to fasten thy heart to Him. Rest and wait. If He sends thee comfort, wait and thank Him; if it be not His pleasure to take away the clouds, or if He exercise thee with pain, yet abide His will and wait. Wait His will, wait what He may yet have to show thee. Wait His time, now especially that the long round of times and opportunities and chances is well-nigh run through, and thou canst no longer make time,

make opportunities, as once it used to be possible. Wait, for He is pleased with waiting, when men wait patiently and humbly. Wait, and do not be in a hurry, as to what is to be with thee. All will be done at the right time. All will be given at the right moment to those who trust Him and lean on His goodness. The hour will come when it is best that it should come. The redemption is drawing near. That for which all here is preparation is not far off. But it cannot be hastened. It can be prayed for. It can be depended upon. It can be believed in. It can be made the stay and lifter up of hearts. But it must be waited for. So—rest and wait.

This is the privilege of Christian old age, of living long after spending a Christian life—the rest of the other world begun, in a measure, in this; it may be even the light, the safety of the other world graciously allowed to flow over, even on this side of death. So is it granted us that we may rest, and wait, and have as the one absorbing thought of the soul, the sure hope of that lot among the saints. And that which was Daniel's especial blessedness is meant for, is open to small and great among Christians, if their life is to be prolonged. Nay, it may be given to some whose life has not been a long one. There are those who in youth have begun to learn to die, who in youth have entered on that long, quiet decay, and waiting for the end, which, in the natural course of things, comes at the close of a full number of our years; there are those who have early felt the arm and heard the call of their Master;

and who thus early are seen to be resting and waiting, as if they had lived through their years to the full ; who are already looking out calmly and peacefully for what is to come. And we too, in middle life, or in its beginning, are indeed called to wait. We know not, at whatever time of life we may be, when the Master may come back and call for us. We too are waiting, if we are believing, if we are hoping. In the midst of business, in the crowd and bustle of life, if we are Christians, we are looking out for that which may come any day, that which we are bid daily to pray for, and which we cannot pray for sincerely without trying to be ready for its coming—the kingdom, the final victory of Christ.

But to us as yet the word is not rest and wait, but, work and wait. To us it is still the time for service to be done to God, for help to be rendered to our brethren, and good upheld, forwarded, defended, fought for, suffered for ; for evil to be withstood, and rebuked, and rooted out of our own hearts, that so we may have our share in rooting it out of God's world. Now is the time and opportunity which each day so plentifully offers to do what God wants to be done. Now is the sowing time when every minute is of value. It is a time of waiting indeed, for we are but God's instruments, and we must not look for success to answer at once to our labour. We must wait ; for all work here is done for a time as yet a long way off. It is a time of waiting because, at any moment, our work may be stopped short, and the great account may be begun with us. But with us it is as yet

no time of rest. It is a time when while we wait with our hearts we must work with our hands, our brains, our strength. If we are young, if we are in good health, if we are still able to do service and duty where God has placed us, it is not yet the time to give ourselves to the quiet looking forward and stillness which is the portion of those whose work is done. Not yet. The time may come, if now we lose not patience; if now through good and evil, through difficulty and temptation, we try to follow our Master's steps; if now we fight the good fight without shrinking, and are not frightened by the burden and heat of the day—the time may come to be given that great blessing and crown of life, if it is so ordered. It is impossible indeed for man to measure the differences of blessedness in a life early ended or lasting on into old age. We see some of Christ's soldiers and servants called away, like men struck down in battle, in the thick of their work, in the very heat of their conflict against sin and evil. And who can venture to pity them? Who can dare doubt whether it is blessed to be thus early summoned when early ready. Yet it is mercy and favour too which keeps others so long at work; which keeps them so long even after their day of work is past. It is not done for nothing. It has the old seal of blessing, which men welcomed in the early days of the world, and which our hearts still acknowledge.

Death, which shocks us so much in middle life, seems to have lost half its awfulness when it comes only in old age. Length of days, even

with eternity to compare with it, does not lose, among such as we are, the show and likeness of a special gift of God. Who that has ever seen a Christian life followed by a Christian old age would give up the precious remembrance of it, as one of the best things that God had ever showed him? Who can doubt that God is greatly to be thanked, when earnest and humble trying to do right is followed by a long period of earnest and humble and patient quietness; of rest from *what was*, and waiting for *what it is to be*? That slow melting of active life into sickness, of sickness into weakness, of weakness into death—those long serious years, passed under deeper and more solemn thoughts, while the soul is looking straight out into the eternal world—how differently do they make us feel from what we do at other times, as they set before our minds more strongly, yet more calmly, what is on the other side of the grave and gate of death? We may not at every moment of the time realize what we are beholding. We often do not know the true meaning of what we are looking at, any more than the true value of what we possess, till afterwards. And in such a time of rest and waiting, after a true and sincere Christian life, we may sometimes, while it is going on before our eyes, miss all that it really is. The accidents of the day are uppermost in what we see and have to do with, and they may disturb or conceal what is going on. There may be fightings, and fears, and struggles. For God gives His comfort and light as He pleases; and those whom He may be lovingly leading on to Himself, He may long

keep under the wholesome discipline of pain, of anxiety, of uncertainty, of humiliation.

But when we look at such a passage and portion of a Christian's life as a whole—when we look back at it all, taking it all together, not in its details and trifles but in its whole meaning—we can see how constantly in one direction the face was set, and remember how, from day to day, the same thoughts of what is eternal and not of this world came up, and asserted their presence. When we think of those long lingering days in which, perhaps, in sorrow and tears, and with a deep sense of unworthiness, the soul was indeed preparing for the place of holiness and light by humbling itself for its sins here—when we remember, it may be, even the shrinking doubt and misgiving of its fitness for that inconceivable glory, the full and real thought of which may well confound those who have had experience of this world's evil and of mortal frailness—when, I say, we look back on such years of old age, stamped and marked through their quiet unchanging course with the one prevailing thought of things to come, we may see—though perhaps not fully till all is over—that we have been watching one whom God had bidden to rest and wait. We have been with one, who, whether in darkness or light, under clouds or in the brightness of hope, was already half living within the veil; who was day by day being taught to feel the nearness and certainty, and the value, which nothing can match, of the world to come.

And let us think what awaits us if our days should be prolonged—what sort of old age is ours likely to

be? For to enter, when our day of work is over, into that waiting time of true, holy, humble preparation, of which Daniel in his end is the type and example, we must be doing good work and faithful service in our day of health. It is not to the unfaithful or the selfish servant that his Master says, when he can work no longer, "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." It is not after worldliness and the waste of life, that the hopes and earnest looking for the promises of the world to come can be with any reason expected. An old age without God, an old age merely looking back to the departed past, and dwelling on the wrecked helpless present—an old age which dares not look to the daily approaching future, is indeed a sadder doom than early death. But if you would not so enter into age, you must guard against it now. That calm waiting for departure, that resting amid increasing weakness on the strength of the unseen Saviour, that patience and resignation which seems like the spirit of the world to come silently stealing on, and gradually changing the soul—you must not look for these, for this blessed rest from earthly conflict and labour, this holy respite for a few days on earth while heaven is in view—you must not look for these after a life worn out in sin, and in the service of yourself. While it is time, do your service to God faithfully. So only can you hope that, whether He calls you early or late, you may share His rest. Wait and work now, and so may you hope to wait and rest when you can

work no longer. Wait and strive, wait and conquer now, till the time comes to enter into that rest which is never to be broken—into the joy that knows no ending—the everlasting peace of God.

XXXV

BEING READY

“Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”—ST. MATTHEW xxiv. 44.

“COMETH”—to try, to judge, to approve, to condemn: “cometh,” in all the various ways in which He, who once came to be the Son of Man, that He might feel and share all man’s lot, and so be qualified to speak of it with sympathy and justice, comes now to call men to give up their account, to change their work or their trial, or to pass sentence on what they have done: “cometh,” in His visitation of trouble or of joy, of chastisement or of relief: “cometh,” as in the hour of death or as in the day of judgment. On all such occasions we are taught to think that it is our Master coming to visit us, to see what we are about, to wind up and pronounce His sentence on the work which He has given us to do. Once in the end of the world He will come to all the world, to close the trial, to declare the final doom of the world; but many times before that last hour He comes to generation after generation, to call them, or to judge them, weighing them in the balance of truth, or giving them fresh openings for repentance and

amendment. And in the same way He is continually coming to each one of us, not only in that time when, in the death which we all must once die, He comes to finish for good our time of trial, but in all the manifold changes and chances of this mortal life; in all the occasions, whatever they may be, which prove and show what is in our hearts, and what we really are.

And with reference to all these comings He thinks it necessary to warn us very solemnly. "Therefore be ye also ready." There is no charge which He has pressed on us more earnestly. There is no warning which He has tried to bring home to our hearts by so many remarkable and startling ways of putting it. He will come as a thief comes in the night; as the Flood which destroyed the generation of Noah surprising the unthinking multitude in the midst of their every-day occupations and every-day pleasures; as the master of the house comes home unexpectedly after a long journey, and finds how his servants are doing their duties when they are not looking to see him; as the lightning flashes in a moment out of the cloud. Or He will come as the bridegroom long tarried for—so long that the watchers think he is never coming, and even the wise virgins slumber and sleep—who suddenly at midnight appears with the cry, "Go ye out to meet him"; or as the lord who has entrusted his talents—the charge and management of his different possessions—to his different servants, and leaves them a long time to themselves, to fulfil his commissions in their own way, and who returns at last to see what they have been doing with their trust, their time, their

liberty, and to pass true and just judgment on the results. These three things Christ has tried to impress on us: that the time of searching and trying us will most certainly come; that though its coming is as certain as that the sun will rise to-morrow, the moment of it is so uncertain that at last it is pretty sure to take us by surprise; and that the trial, when it comes, will be in earnest and not in show; that it will be a trial at once most thorough and most fair, most severe yet most liberal, most unflinching in its proofs yet most merciful and considerate, and more than generous to all who have honestly tried to prepare for it.

This then is our Lord's teaching about what we call the trials of life. They are called trials, because they try and measure what we are, what we can do, what we really wish for and try after; because they are times when we throw off all seeming and outward profession, and let perhaps even man's eye see what is the true thing beneath our profession; because they put a strain upon us greater than we are under in ordinary times, and force us to use all our strength, and show our genuine character; force us to do our best, or, perhaps, to do our worst. We all of us know what such trials are; and the Bible gives additional solemnity to them, by setting before us *Who* it is who is trying us at those trying moments and on those trying occasions. We have to go through our trial before the eyes and the judgment of the Son of Man; of Him who knows the hearts of all men, and who was once tempted and tried as men are now. "In all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth"—when we are

surprised by sorrow or surprised by gladness—when what we most feared comes upon us, or when what we most longed for is given us—when the course of the world takes a turn against us which upsets all our plans and darkens all our hopes, or when some change in our life meets us of which we cannot tell whether it means good or evil, the opening into brighter days or the beginning of troubles—in all these times alike it is our Master come to try us, to see how we have used our past time, to see what we have gradually grown into, to see whether we are ready, or not yet ready, to answer to His summons, to fulfil what He has for us to do.

And how shall we be ready? Now the peculiarity of these trials of our readiness is, that many of them, and some of the most difficult ones, are such that we cannot prepare for them *directly*, and with the full feeling that they are coming. Of those that we know for a certainty are coming, there are but a certain number of which we can say, "Now I know how I shall be tried in this case, and I will prepare myself directly to meet it." We are, perhaps, strong in health now. It is difficult to persuade ourselves that we shall ever be otherwise, but it is difficult, indeed, for a man in health to realize to himself what he will be when health shall begin to break up and fail, when he is no longer the man that he is now. It is almost vain to try and imagine generally what it will be when that great trial comes; it is, of course, impossible to forecast what we should most want to know, in order to prepare *directly* for it, the particular circum-

stances under which it is to visit us. And yet, I suppose, that most of us will have, in some shape or another, for a longer or a shorter time, to meet this trial ; of all the things which are reserved for us in our lot to come, this is one which we may reckon on with the greatest likelihood. And yet what it will actually be when it comes, we cannot guess. So direct preparation for it is not easy. We cannot make ready for it as we make ready for next year's harvest ; as we make ready for a business which we know has to be got through, for a promise which we know will be claimed and must be fulfilled. We must be ready for it, and ready at any moment. Like all great trials it is not a thing to be made ready for just at the time when it comes. And yet it is not often that we have so distinctly the feeling of its coming, that with it in view we can get ready for it.

We may, indeed, make sure of this, that the great trials of our life, whatever they are, are pretty sure, when they do at last come, to surprise us, to come upon us in an unexpected way, and at the time when we were least thinking of them. Even if we know when they will come, yet when the day comes they will be different from what we expected. We may see the black cloud hanging over our heads, or the promised sunshine dawning ; we may know and feel that we are coming nearer and nearer to it ; but what the storm will prove to be, or what the sunshine, mortal hearts do not know enough of themselves, or of what shall be about them in the time to come, to foretell or to guess at aright. We thought the trial would take

us on one side, it *does* take us just on the other. We thought that it would be easy to meet in one direction and hard in another; as it turns out, the hardness of it comes just where we thought it would be easy, and what looked so hard turns out easy. We say to ourselves, "Oh that I only knew what was coming! Oh that I could only have fair notice and warning! Then would I keep my thoughts in order, then would I be ready to speak what I ought, and to do the right thing." But it is no use wishing. And it is worth observing that, as things happen in this world, it would in most cases be of little use to us if we could know what we wish. For the things which we look forward to, and think that we can tell all about beforehand, are seldom, when they do come, what we painted them to ourselves in our imperfect thoughts while they were at a distance.

We must be ready to take things as they come. We must be ready without knowing particularly how our Master will be pleased to try us. This is the real and true proof of our hearts; and this is the way in which, as a matter of fact, trials come to us all. General notice and warning is given us, but not often more than that. And we must not be like that unreasonable householder, wise after the event, who expected the thief to tell him beforehand when he was coming. So our Lord teaches us. "But know this, that if the good-man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up." Of course he would; but when does the thief

give certain notice of his coming? And what watching is it, what trial of a man's patience and resolution and attention to the dangers round him, if he requires to know the exact hour when he must be on his guard? And what excuse is it for his negligence, that he would have been prepared if only he had been sure when the thief was coming? He knew that the thief was about; that was all the knowledge he could look for. The proof of his watchfulness and readiness was whether he would be prepared for the thief, come when he might.

It is too late to prepare ourselves and make ready when the time of our trial is upon us. How many have with bitterness, and with a pang of inexpressible self-condemnation, made proof of that experience. The becoming ready must go on in the ordinary every-day course of things, by which, step by step, we come to our trial; in the quiet spaces of leisure and the untroubled days when we do not yet feel the press and spur of the trial, but when, by little and little, we are becoming fitted or unfitted to bear the strain and stress of it. We have time given us to practise ourselves, to learn what we shall need to know, to get into good ways, and to break off from bad ones; then comes the trial to see what we have done with our time. It is like the examination of the children of a school. There is the whole year to prepare for the examination, which is to test and measure what the scholars have learned—the whole year, with its weeks one just like another; its regular lessons, which one child does well and another carelessly; its steady,

plodding round of work, each step of which is easy, and made still easier by help and teaching; its long space to prepare in, when yet there is no particular call at any moment to be more careful than ordinary. Then comes the examination—the time that once looked so far off, and for which there was so much leisure to prepare; then it is seen what each child has really been about in this long time of preparation; then he who is ready is ready because, when no one was thinking of the examination, he was doing his work well for the work's sake, and because it was right to do it well, though it was but a common school task; then he who is not ready is not ready because the common, dull, ordinary hours of reading and writing and learning were thrown away, and what was to be done in them cannot be recovered, cannot be made up for, cannot by any violent effort and sacrifice be reached at a spring when they are passed away.

Let us then become ready, not by anxiously and curiously looking forward and asking what is to become of us, but by carefully and faithfully looking for what good thing we have *now* to do; by listening for what call and warning our conscience is whispering to us—what true and solemn word is being brought home to our hearts by God's Spirit in His Holy Word. What we should wish is that our Master, if He came at a moment's notice, might find us so occupied that we need not be ashamed of what He found us doing. To live remembering that He is watching us, even though He does not at the moment visit us, or seem to

notice us, this is the way to be ready for Him when He does come to visit and to try us. He gives us easy tasks to prepare us for harder ones; the one talent to use, that we may be fit to be entrusted with the ten; the little passing trials of temper and good feeling, to practise us for the harder trials of sickness, disappointment, separation. Oh, let us remember the great importance, the solemn effects of these easy tasks and trials. They are our preparation, our only preparation for whatever is to come. And according as we behave ourselves in them—according as in them we are unselfish and true, mindful of the reality of God's love and will, faithful to our light and our conscience, not afraid to say and to do what is right—so when the time comes which is really to sift and try us through and through to the very quick—so shall we be ready.

XXXVI

THE TRANSITORINESS OF THIS PRESENT LIFE

“Yet a little while.”—ST. JOHN xiii. 33.

THESE words were very often on our Lord's lips in His last days. They are words of looking forward. They point to something that will soon be here, or soon be gone, or soon be over; blessing or sorrow, joy or distress. In these words the speaker leaps over the interval that separates what is now from what is to come, and brings Himself close in mind and thought to what is yet out of sight. “Little children,” He says to the apostles, after He had washed their feet, “yet a little while I am with you.” There it is the looking forward to what must be, the sad but necessary separation. “Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me.” There it is the looking forward to that time when His being taken from the world, and lost to sight, shall not hinder His being still with those who love Him. “Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you.” There was the warning to the doubting Jews that

their day of grace was quickly running out, that they had no time to lose, that they must make up their minds at once, if they were to make them up at all. So often had He said the words that the disciples were struck and puzzled by it. "A little while," He says, "and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father." Here was the looking forward at once to a great loss and great comfort, soon to come to them; and they could not make it out. "Then said some of His disciples among themselves, What is this that He saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that He saith, A little while? we cannot tell what He saith." Jesus knew, and answered their secret questionings. He "knew that they were desirous to ask Him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me?" And here was His answer. He bade them face the certainty, soon to come, of anguish and bitter tears; but to look forward and see beyond, a certainty—as sure and almost as speedy—of that anguish being stilled, and those tears dried for ever. "Verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."

"A little while": at this time of the year¹ the words come of themselves into our minds, and

¹Preached on the Sunday before Advent Sunday.

almost on to our lips. For now it is a time of looking forward. A little while and Christmas will be here; a little while and this year will be over, and we shall have begun a new one. Another month, and another year will have rolled away, further from our birth, from our youth, from the things we remember when we were young, from the friends whom we once lived with and who are gone, from the time when we had other homes, and lived among other faces, from the first Advent of our Saviour, from the beginning of the world. Another year has rolled away, further from all this; and a new year will roll in, nearer to our Lord's second Advent, nearer to the end of the world—a year which, if we reach it, we know not what may happen to us in it. At any rate, it will be nearer to our end than this one, nearer to that year which is fixed for us to die in.

“A little while.” With what different feelings these words fall on our ears, according to what we look forward to—whether we look forward with heaviness or with hope to what is to be; with the feeling that our redemption draweth nigh, or with the feeling that the days of darkness are coming on. But, at this time, this last month of the year, this Advent season, we cannot help, either as men or as Christians—we cannot help, in spite of ourselves, looking forward. Let us then look forward. It is a good thing to look forward. We don't do it half enough. We stay, fixed and fast bound in what is before us, as if it would last and be the same for ever; and we are hardly able to shake and rouse ourselves, and think what

is to come of all we are doing now, what is to be after it, and what we ought to do to meet it when it comes. It is a good thing to look forward; to see in our minds things as they will be though they are not yet come; to get to believe in what must be by-and-bye, as we believe in what is now. And much more is it good to look forward, in matters of God and the soul, which are matters of faith. Let us now, for a few minutes, try to do this—to look forward, not in one way but in several; to take ourselves from things that are now to what must be in a little while.

“A little while.” Think of the changes which a little while will bring in the look of everything that we have before our eyes, and in all that we are most familiar with now. A little while and the children will have become men and women, and the men and women of to-day, if they are not dead, will be the old and sick and grey-headed, no longer able to work. The children who can scarcely stand—who cannot take care of themselves—the children who play about, whom we treat kindly or roughly, but without ceremony, as if we had no account to give to them of what we do—who live in a sort of different world from our world of business and serious matters—they will be grown up into young men and women, marrying and settling in life, prospering or failing in their line of work, anxious and obliged to be serious in what they do, each going their own way, good or evil, happy or wretched. They will have come into our places, they will be bringing up families in our houses; they will be doing our work; they will be changing

and doing what they will with what we hold to most jealously, they will be the persons who will have the right and the power to settle and manage everything over which we have the power now. They will have their ideas, their opinions, their fancies, their wishes, as strongly as we have ours, and think as much of them as we do. To-day they are mere children; we look at them, and can hardly fancy them anything else; but so it must be. These very children whom we can only think of as mere children, though some may die, are in the great number of them they who, in a little while, will be the rulers and workers, the masters and servants, filling our empty places, and thinking of themselves and of us, as we think of ourselves compared with our fathers who have done their work, whose power has expired in the world.

“A little while.” Who of us can hope to have no trouble and sorrow in this life? We are as others; others have suffered, and I suppose most of us must suffer too. The trouble perhaps has not come yet; the sickness, the pain, the disappointment the hopeless illness, the parting, the bereavement; not yet—but a little while and it will be here. Quicker and quicker we are going forward to the time when it is to be; shorter and shorter becomes the time that lies between us and it. And are we ready? Could we bear it like men, like Christian believers, like sufferers and mourners who trust in God? And not sorrow only is coming. To many, doubtless, what their hearts have long desired and long waited for, as if it was never to come, the bright

joy and noonday of their life is coming ; a little while, and the waiting will be over ; what seemed never coming will come soon enough. But the most difficult thing in the world almost is to get ourselves to think that what is now will ever have an end, and be changed to something utterly different. If we are merry and careless, we cannot imagine the brightness of our day being clouded. If we are now in trouble we cannot look forward to the end ; we cannot imagine it ever taken away or ever lighter. Yet look forward a little while, and it will be over ; the smart, and the bitterness, and the heaviness of heart. It seems as if there was no end to it ; it may last for months or years, but it will then be over—like the months and years that lie behind us, which are passed away like a tale that is told. A little while, and all must be changed, present joy and present sadness. Other things may grieve us, but not what grieves us now ; other things may gladden us, but not what gladdens us now. Let a short time pass, and all that is about us now will be gone and over. We shall not see the things or the people we are seeing every day now. We shall not be doing the things that we are doing now. We shall not be hearing of the interests, the disputes, the complaints, the quarrels, that we hear of now. The names that make a stir in the world, the questions about which we get so hot and excited, the parties, the fashions, the amusements, the books, the ways of people to each other—all that we are so accustomed to and know so well, will all have passed away, and be only talked of by old men who remember them. All our generation will be

gone; all its loves and hatreds, its joys and sorrows, its pleasures and its pains, its good deeds and its evil ones, all will be over. Our houses will look different, and others will do what they please with our goods. The trees will still get green and get bare; the grass and flowers will grow and fade as they do now; winter will come with its cold, and summer with its brightness; the mountains and the sea will look as they have looked to all men from the beginning of the world; the stars will shine as they shone down on the first men, on Moses, and on Abraham; but a little while and *we* shall be gone, and all that we have lived in and known shall have been changed. A little while, and all that is dark now shall be made clear. The world is full of mystery, full of hard questions as to what is right and what is wrong, what is wise and what is madness for a man to do here. Christ tells us, but we often seem to have to take it on trust from Him; for other teachers tell a different tale, and read our duty differently. Our own heart and conscience tell us, but the world seems wise, and has many on its side, and often laughs our conscience to scorn. What is the right side, and what is the wrong side to take? Even when we think we see we often don't feel sure. Often when the truth seems to be whispered in the still small voice within us, we question and argue about it. Often the truth seems dark and hard to get at. And how often are we false to our better selves! How often do we shrink before difficulties where only our crookedness or cowardice or selfishness make them! How often do we lose our sense of what is right

and what is wrong, because we do not like the truth, and are afraid of the light!

We can go on so here. We see not God. His voice is not heard by mortal ears, telling us not to go wrong. Christ has come, and spoken, and gone—once, and once for all. With us it must remain whether we will walk by what He has once said, or cast His words behind us because we do not hear them from His own mouth. We may doubt and delay, and say we have not made up our mind, and don't know how to make it up. We may doubt whether this world is not after all the best portion, the best bargain we can make. We may doubt whether sin is sinful, whether evil is hated of God and doomed to ruin. We may doubt whether we shall be punished for what we have done wrong, and for going on in wrong ways. We may doubt whether it *is* necessary to fear God and to keep His commandments, and to be of His servants and children. We may doubt of all this—this world will never make us certainly clear of our doubts; while here, we shall never be so certain as to have no temptation to disbelieve. But a little while and we shall be made certain; a little while—it cannot be very long—and with death it will all be made clear; a little while and we shall *know*.

“A little while”—and not this generation only, but all that this world was made for, will be over. A little while, and the time of judgment shall be, and it shall be made manifest Who is the true Ruler of the world, and who are His. “Yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” Little does it matter whether it be hun-

dreds or thousands of years hence that the Judge and Saviour is to return. It will be all one—but a little while—when He shall have come, never more to part with those who love Him. Once more His warning voice, given by this Advent time, sounds to all those whom He has spared through this year to hear it yet again. Once more look forward. Don't be so buried in the present, and taken up with what is now, as not to be able to see that all that is now must soon pass away, must soon be changed to something utterly different. Do your work heartily, for on what you do now depends what is to be ; but don't be so wrapt up in it that you cannot imagine or fancy a change—that change which must come over you, and over all around you, and all that you have to do with.

“A little while” and all shall be gone that we have known on earth. A little while and all shall be gone of what has been in the world, save righteousness, and truth, and faith, and love, and goodness. A little while and we shall be no more meeting together in this house of prayer ; our worship will be over here, we shall have ceased to praise Him here, our psalms of hope, or joy, or sadness, shall no more be heard. A little while and it will be too late to repent, too late to ask forgiveness, too late to leave off our evil ways. A little while and faith will have done its work, and all will be over ; the road and its dangers, all tears and toil, all trials and searchings of heart, all temptation and sin—all will be over. The weary will be at rest, the tempted shall be set free, the conquerors shall have won their crown. Then for the darkness and mystery of this world

there shall be light. Then shall be the joy that no one can take away. Then there shall be no more change when there shall be no more any meaning in the words, "a little while." For that which is to be will have come, and come for evermore. The sowing will be over, with the reaping, and the winnowing, and sifting; the harvest will have been gathered in.

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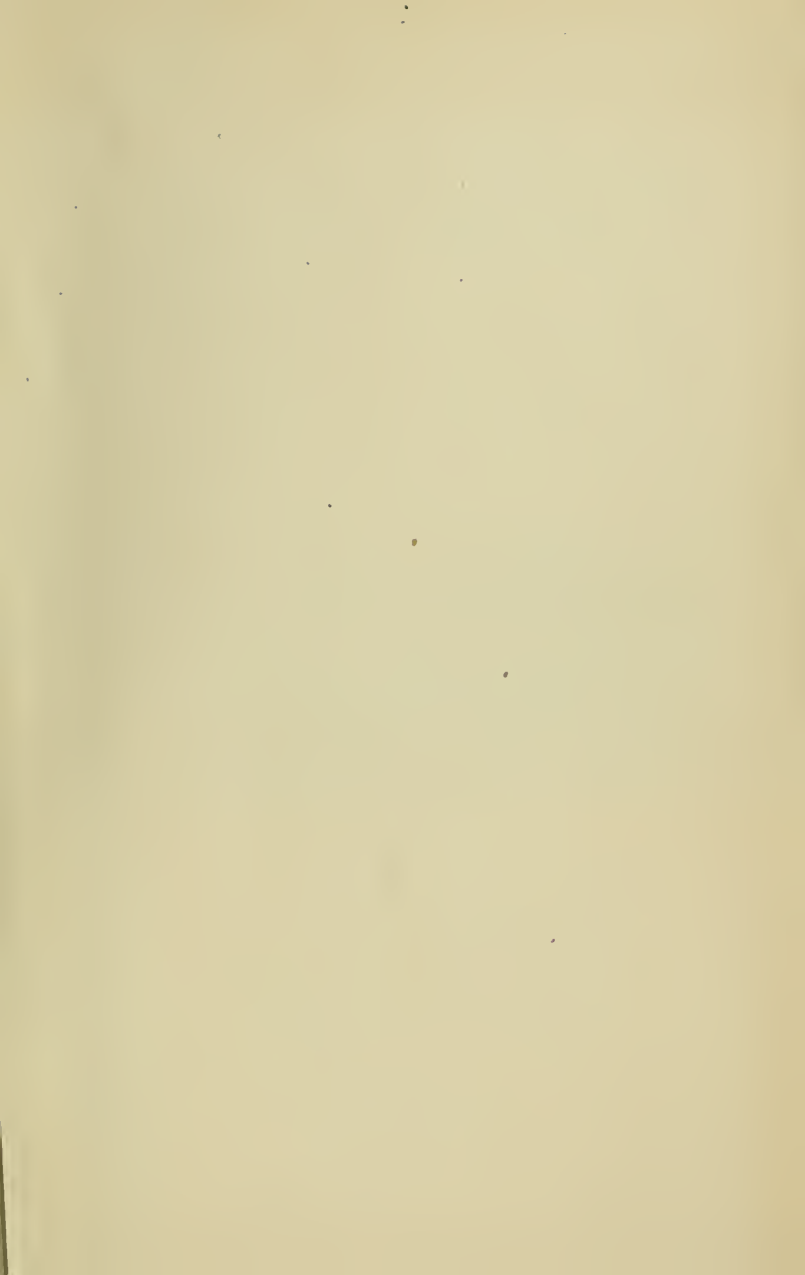
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